

THE HUNTRESS OF AKKAN By Robert Moore Williams

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BACK
COVER

AMAZING STORIES

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STORIES



INVASION OF THE MICRO-MEN

By RICHARD S. SHAVER

VOLUME 20
NUMBER 1

FEBRUARY
1946

MEET *the* AUTHORS

PRESENTING THE AUTHOR OF "JEWEL OF DEATH"



Chester S. Geier

WHEN not inquiring as to what I do for a living, or as to where I get my plots, people frequently ask me how I happened to become a writer. To tell the truth, I don't know exactly myself. The truly momentous decisions of our lives are those formed quite suddenly, in a flashing moment of inspiration. I do know, however, that I possessed a temperamental and intellectual background which made more or less inevitable ready inclination toward writing as a career.

For one thing, I've always had vague creative urges. There was a period when I quite seriously considered commercial art as a likely field. For another, I've been a very heavy reader, especially of the brand of fiction known as science and fantasy, since the age of 12, when Fate gave me a kick in the pants in the form of an attack of spinal meningitis which left me permanently and totally deaf. Along with all this reading, I must unconsciously have absorbed some of the know-how of writing, which in combination with what I shall vainly call my natural creative talents, left a gap requiring only a chance action or remark to bridge.

As nearly as I can recall, such a stimulus was furnished by an introduction in my last year of high school to William Lawrence Hamling, then the editor of the school magazine. I learned that Bill wrote stories. What process of idea-association followed, I don't know, but the next thing I remember is that I was feverishly scribbling atrocious yarns of my own, and that Bill and

I had become firm friends.

I was 18 then. A lot of time—according to my relative viewpoint—has passed. Time which, curiously enough, I measure not in months or years, but in story acceptances and rejections. There are some professions that get into the blood and bones of a man, so that he does all his living and breathing in its atmosphere and all his thinking and dreaming in its terms. Fantasy writing seems to be even more applicable to this condition.

My life for the past six years has been a sort of crazy-quilt, patchwork affair. Upon graduation from high school, I won a four-year scholarship to the University of Chicago. I stuck it out for only two years, and this because I wrote science-fiction and carried on various fan activities at times when I should have been studying. When schooling interfered with that, the schooling went by the board.

Following this, I held a variety of jobs. I've been successively a drill press operator, assembler, billing clerk, order checker, stock clerk, and expeditor of war materials for a shipping firm. Like most people bent on writing as a career, I've never considered jobs very seriously. To me they always meant little more than temporary stop-gaps between periods of full-time writing. I'd work a little, save a little, write a little, and then start all over again.

Somewhat over a year ago, Bill Hamling and I opened up a writing office on Chicago's North Side. Bill had then recently been retired as a lieutenant of infantry in the army as the result of a little argument with a land mine, in which he came out second best. We set out to take the editors by storm, concentrating our attacks mainly on the venerable Rap, whose defenses despite his age were slowly and with difficulty beaten down. Rap—or Ray Palmer, to the uninitiated—is a good sport, though, and knows when he's licked. He began buying. He's still doing so, I might mention. Neither Bill nor myself knows why, but that fact alone is sufficient.

Bill and I still have the office. It would make interesting reading, I suppose, to say that a furious rivalry exists between us, or that we steal each other's plots, or that we constantly play clever jokes on one another. But the disappointing truth is that we're both much too staid to do more than get into an occasional mild argument over some writing technicality or twist of plot.

I'm 24 now; 6' 4" tall, and weight around 160 pounds more or less—usually less—which gives me somewhat the general appearance of a broomstick handle; gray-green eyes, brown hair, nicotine-stained complexion; and married. My better half, a freckle-faced Irish lass with mischievous green eyes, serves as my inspiration, in a purely financial way, for the yarns I now write. Further inspiration—also purely financial—is shortly due to be forthcoming.

As to what I do when not writing . . . well, I read science-fiction, putter around the house, bowl, and play an occasional game of poker. I do the latter with even less skill than the former. What keeps me going is the knowledge that there's always room for improvement.

The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

THIS is Volume 20, No. 1—and that means twenty years of AMAZING STORIES! Back in April, 1926, Hugo Gernsback published the first of a new kind of literature called science fiction. It was fiction based on science, and carrying known science into the future; it was fiction based on fact; it was fiction based on legend; it was fiction based on imagination inspired by what man calls scientific knowledge.

THROUGH twenty years this new magazine has grown until today AMAZING STORIES is a by-word among the peoples of every country in the world. Today people say "AMAZING STORIES tells science what can be done, and then science does it!" No longer do people sneer at those "Jules Verne fantasies"; instead, when anything happens, like the atom bomb, they say: "That's nothing new—I read about that in AMAZING STORIES years ago!"

AMAZING STORIES was such a success that many imitators sprang up—but with each addition to the field, the popularity of the magazine grew until today the magazine is the acknowledged leader in the field, read by three times as many readers as any other science fiction magazine, and boasting a circulation as great as the best pulp magazine in America. And you readers can be proud of it. It is your imagination, your support, your ideas which make it what it is.

AMAZING STORIES is the only magazine which has ever carried the word *sciencefiction* out to its fullest. From anthropology to zoology; from dim antiquity to distant future; from straight fact to the highest soaring of imagination—the coverage has been complete. AMAZING STORIES IS science fiction. But it is also something more—it is the untrammelled mind of Man; it is the signpost pointing the way to his mental development; it is the slide-rule of his physical progress; and lastly, it is the growth of that most important thing, his soul. As Man does not die, neither will science fiction—as you read it in AMAZING STORIES. The day will come when there is no more AMAZING STORIES, but the day will never come when its effect is not written on the pages of man's history. The progress of Man toward his mysterious goal has been influenced enormously by this magazine—

may the future carry on this work a hundred fold; for in its pages is the seed of all true knowledge.

"INVASION OF The Micro-Men" is a sequel to "I Remember Lemuria!" and brings back all the famous characters you met in that most sensational story of a decade. You'll be delighted to learn more of the adventures of Mutan Mion, the last earthman to leave this planet with the Titans; and of Vanece, that glorious goddess of space; and of Ari, the lovely adored one of Mutan Mion. Further, this story might be termed the second in one ramification of a series of twists taken by the entire mass of stories we have come to consider as the meat of "The Shaver Mystery." It will carry on the original thread, that of Mutan Mion, and lead you into a coming novel in which Mutan meets and battles with one of the most controversial characters in all history, legend, and religion—Sathana.

BY THE way, we have a booby prize to offer those readers who did not have the imagination to read "between the lines" of "Thought Records Of Lemuria" in our June issue and realize that the "snake that encircled the world" is symbolic of the oceans.

AND while we are talking of symbolism, literally thousands of excited letters have come in to this editor, exclaiming over the symbolism of all the Shaver stories, and we are delighted to know that so many people know what is going on in the world today and better still, are doing something about it.

THE Shaver stories are not fiction in their basis—although all of them have been presented in fiction form, dramatized, and properly edited to make them acceptable entertainment. They have proven to be the most entertaining stories we have ever presented, and the startling reason our readers give is their realism, their basic truth, which makes them more convincing than any fiction ever before presented in this magazine.

BECAUSE of typesetters strikes in Chicago, this issue will not contain some of the features we have planned on, relating to the Shaver Mystery, (Continued on page 52)



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All **STORIES** *Complete*

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Front Cover painting by Malcolm Smith illustrating a scene from "Invasion of the Micro-Men"

Back cover painting by James E. Sattles illustrating "Trade Your Trouble for a Bubble"

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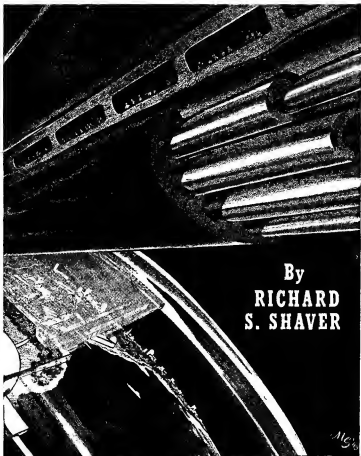
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Volume 20
Number 1

INVASION OF THE MICRO-MEN



Out of this tramp ship from space came the most awful menace ancient Nor had ever faced—and Mutan Mion faced a supreme test



By
**RICHARD
S. SHAVER**

The great locks in the plastic planet shell opened . . .

I MUTAN MION, of the Space Cadet Corps of the Nortan Space Navy, on leave from the Dread-Nor *Wardark* had been long absent. I

dressed with care. The black and glittering scales of my uniform I laced about my legs with careful attention. About my shoulders I threw the golden

cape of a fledgling of the Space Corps. I stood before the mirror for a last admiring glance at the glory that was me, to me. In my hand I held a new portable thought augmentor with which to show my friends my truly glad thoughts at meeting them once more. For my beloved mate, Arl, too, there were a number of mental images I hoped particularly she would note, for it had been a weary, long time away from her. As for Vanue, my mind craved her strong reassuring logic complimenting my conduct in the trying period of adjustment I had been through. She had become a staff of my life, and I walked not well without her.

I was now a member of the great Nor Cadet Corps, from which training I would be allowed to select several future careers—the Space Navy of Nor; the Nor-patrol; the Technician; or the Engineer-cor, which selection would be controlled both by my natural aptitudes and by the selections of my nearest friends within the organizations.

As I sped down the ways in a hired rollat past the great ramps of the interplan commerce locks, where ships from a thousand far-flung planets lay waiting cargo and inspection of official papers, I noticed with curiosity a particularly villainous looking ship. An ancient patched-up wreck she was, and about her a crew of caricatures such as I had not seen since I left the dero of earth behind me.

They were clad in filthy rags; they were misshapen and evil of aspect. Some were borned and four or six armed. There were evidences of both Titan and Variform blood, but the predominant strain was one strange to me. Their legs were hairy and bowed, their backs humped and overly broad for their height. Their faces were distinguished chiefly by a nose that spread over most of its surface, their ears stuck

out like sails, and all were alike in their careless, distressed appearance.

I asked my driver who these tramps might be, and how it was such an evil looking outfit had been allowed to enter the great port.

"They are Jotuns," he answered, "newly arrived. They come every year or so to buy our junk—worn-out machines, which they rebuild, space-ships no longer serviceable for sane men, and stimulative mechanisms which no one but they would use, even if rebuilt. They are dwellers in abandoned caverns on planets which have been avoided for one reason or another on the rims of the Nor government's influence in space.

"There are a lot of them, and few of their cities are even on the maps. They are an evil lot, but tolerated for certain reasons, such as information the Service gets from them about the lawless frontiers. They learn things no one else could, you see. But if I had my way, they would not be allowed within a dozen light years of Nor. They deal in many forbidden things—slaves, illegal drugs, and worse. If Nor had an enemy, the Jotuns would be the first to be used as spies upon us."

AS WE passed the ancient encrusted hulk and the motley mob of people clustered about it—a curious sense of foreboding touched me with a finger of cold. Had not Nor learned its lesson with ignorant dero? Didn't they yet know a dero when they saw one? There was an ominous something about their presence; what it was I could not quite put my finger on. Would that a man could learn ever to listen to such hunches—he would forestall many a disaster.

But thoughts of such an unpleasant nature had small room in my mind tonight. I was on my way to Vanue's

great home. This was my first leave since my induction into the great Cadet Corps, my first step toward my goal, the Nor-patrol. It was the first time I had stepped from the *Wardark*, on which my training had begun. The anticipation of seeing Arl and the laughing faces of the lively Nor-maids who served Vanue left little thought for the tracing down of vague and baseless forebodings. Besides, it was idiotic to think the things called Jotuns would be able to pull anything dangerous under the vigilant eyes that watched over all the rich and happy life that was Nor.

Such is overconfidence, and one contracted it from every Nortan mind, for it was true that Nortan strength and Nortan war-tech was superior to any other we knew of in all space—save only the greater cities of the Elder planets, so far away and so much larger that the inhabitants had no use for our small worlds. We were blind with an overwhelming confidence in the vastness of our superiority over other life in all the many worlds we touched with our vast empire's power.

THE lilies of Nor are beautiful enough during their everyday occupations, but when they preen for a social affair and the air gets heavy with augmentive conductor electric, so that the sweet essence of their body magnetism pervades and awakens a man's senses, they are too much for one's peace of mind. Swimming in this dream of beauty I walked forward through the throng of Nor-maids about Vanue to pay my homage to her beauty's might and to her as my chosen leader. Also I had to learn the whereabouts of Arl, as this homecoming was my first pleasure in months.

I was welcomed to a gathering so large it could hardly be in my honor, but felt so to me, with all the faces of

those too-lovely Nor-maids greeting me, and laying out their sweet souls in graceful thought augments for me to look upon. To know that their smiles were true ones—that was heart warming frankness.

I bent my knee before Vanue's seated might, and touched my forehead to her knee, which is the custom before one's chosen Elder.

Tonight Vanue was clad in some unusual fine mesh of conductive stuff through which ran the current from powerful vi-batteries¹ in her belt. The current was a synthetic vi. The magnetic flow caused the whole fabric to flame with tongues of vital, caressing energy. That cloud of floating hair which was one of Vanue's chief prizes was bound tonight in a net, the cords of which were strung with huge rubies; so that Vanue was a living goddess of flame, and her matchless body was the pivot upon which all the eyes turned in that hall.

Her spirit was flaming tonight, too, and she led the furious revelry.

CHAPTER II

The Jotuns Play a Card

THE Jotuns are the pariahs of space.

A numerous race, they live in abandoned borings on many planets on the rim of the Nor empire, as well as throughout the less desirable areas of all known space. Wherever the law does not reach, there one is apt to find the Jotuns. They deal in junk, slaves, and several stimulative drugs whose use is forbidden among civilized peoples. But no one worries much what happens to the Jotuns or their health. They are hardly considered as men. They have four limbs and a round head set on a man-like neck, it is true. But

¹ Vi is the Nor word for animal electric.—Ed.

they have immense and comical noses, wide mouths with thick lips, a dark and lumpy skin, huge hat-wing ears, short bowed legs, and a stringy, ungainly muscular development of no beauty whatever. They buy worn-out and condemned space-ships, repair them after their own apparently slovenly fashion, and with them voyage between their gloomy and filthy planet homes in the abandoned caverns of the greater space races.

At least that is the Nortan view of the Jotuns. Actually the Jotuns are a race whose luck threw them into a life where their backwardness left them no recourse but to cull the crumbs left by superior life for whatever might provide a means of existence. The Nortans had never been consciously antagonistic to them, but their attitude of supreme contempt had left the Jotuns nothing but dregs. So the Jotuns had cultivated a furtive kind of piracy, and were seldom caught at it. One of their choice pursuits was the stealing of women when opportunity presented—whom they debased with their hasty science of growth learned from the Nortan and corrupted to other ends than had ever been the thought of the Nortan scientists. The pleasure palaces that flourished on the frontiers where law left off paid high prices for these little-advertised products of the Jotun industry. For around the vast frontiers of the space empires hang always the parasites and outlaws that every great nation breeds—and the pleasure palaces flourish to pander to the depraved tastes of these castoffs of the swarming life of the civilized worlds of dark space.

TODAY in the High Court of Nor city, there was much laughter. The Jotun tramp had herthed in the commerce port, to pick up its usual load of

unwanted junk. Someone had noticed several very human and non-Jotun-like women among the passengers or crew of the filthy ship. Questioned, the Jotuns were unwilling to account for the non-Jotuns' presence to the officials. They had been arrested and charged with slavery, the most serious crime on the Nor law books. The truth was, the higher-ups had wanted a chance to learn something about the activity of the Jotuns, and had seized the opportunity to give them a thorough going over. The case was sent to the highest court of all, that held by the Elder Rulers once a jarp.²

The Ruler, the oldest Elder in all Nor, questioned the Jotun tramp's skipper himself.

"Just *why* are these strange young people accompanying you Jotuns aboard your ship? Explain their presence to us!"

The fierce, ugly face of the Jotun glared steadily at the huge form of the Elder. His cunning little eyes danced here and there about the great, luxuriously constructed chamber, the rich drapes, the jeweled Nortans listening, the soft, rich atmosphere of Nortan well-being. That he hated it all was rather apparent. He was in no hurry to answer, but seemed to be thinking deeply, swiftly, on some problem not clear to anyone but himself. At last he shouted at the Elder, loudly and not at all abashed at the physical evidence of power before which his freedom and his life stood in jeopardy.

"They are young people of a far-off planet called Angleland. The people there are newly arrived colonists, and have no prejudices or hate against the Jotuns. They made our crew welcome there and we stayed some time. These fell in love with members of our crew, and left with us of their own free will."

² A jarp is about a fortnight of time.—Ed.

The phrase "fell in love" with *Jotuns*, brought a tremendous shout of laughter from the assembled Nortans. For to a Nortan mind the Jotun is the uttermost in repellent human life—the last word in undesirability in a mate. The answer in truth was a ridiculous one. For no normal appearing human would ever fall in love with a Jotun. It was as preposterous as falling in love with an ape.

The anger mounted in the Jotun leader's face as the laughter rose to a peak in the great court chamber. And as his anger mounted it seemed to answer the problem he had been revolving in his mind. A package fell from under his arm—a paper wrapped parcel—and broke open. A number of tiny glittering marbles rolled everywhere about the floor. No one noticed the mishap, and the Jotun skipper did not appear to notice the incident either.

THE Ruler of all Nor ceased his prolonged chuckle to turn to the young people in question, who were blond Angles, recent settlers from Earth's migrations. His great voice seemed to arouse no awe in the young Angles as he asked,

"Is this true—this preposterous statement of the defense?"

The comely young Angles, all of about the same size, running from six to seven feet, and none of them over thirty years of age, nodded their heads in assent.

"What the chief says is true, O mighty Lord," was their astounding answer.

A deep silence fell upon the courtroom, for the thralldom of fear or something worse in which the young Angles were enmeshed, was so evident that all present realized that here was something far worse than slavery.

As the great voice of the ancient Elder went on, saying—"Why do you call this man a chief? Is he, then, more than just the captain of a particularly slovenly tramp space-vessel?"—the chief of the motley, dangerous looking crew noticed the gew gaws rolling over the floor under his feet, and bent frantically trying to gather up the spilled gauds, but they rolled everywhere across the green glitter of the marble paving.

His efforts aroused another laugh at his expense, for all Jotuns cut a ridiculous figure in a Nortan eye. He crouched there on the polished floor, a small figure among the great of this court, though his height was a good forty feet standing.³

The great bodies of the Elders who staffed the court dwarfed him, but something in his eyes as they darted everywhere, searching the faces of these Lords of Infinite Powers, told one that he had no fear of them, and little respect. Those darting, evil eyes and scaly-fingered hands made ineffectual and comic efforts to pick up the tiny, rolling, glistening things. Near him the aristocratic noses of the Nor audience wrinkled at the smell of unwashed flesh his movements drove from his filthy, food-stained clothing.

One Jotun was busy putting several paper wrapped bundles into the mail chute. A passing Nor guard called, "Stupid—that's an airshaft, not a mail chute."

³ Though the Jotuns were not immortal—strictly speaking—their use of the abandoned mechanisms and technical growth methods of the immortal races, which they had picked up from use of the mechanisms and from observation of the Nortan life, had given them similar growth; but at about the age of this Chief, which was several centuries—they began to decline and eventually die; for the abandoned mech are abandoned for that reason—the disintegrant poisons have begun to accumulate within the metal of the generators, and are thereafter not safe for immortals.—Ed.

The Jotun fumbled with the packages, two of them broke open. He picked up the remains, shambled on to the mail chute. As soon as the guard walked on he moved down the passage to the next air shaft, went through the same fumbling process. No one noticed or cared what a dim-witted Jotun might do at an air shaft.

Suddenly the officer of the guards standing about the court was made suspicious by the fellow's peculiar behavior, and barked an order.

"Collect those jewels and bring them to me. We may have something else illegal there. He is entirely too worried about those stones—if stones they are. I say put these people at once into thought mech augment and find out just what this is all about."

THE ruler of Nor, now officiating as the Judge, raised a hand to summon the augment⁴ rays from numerous guard ray chambers, of which there were dozens trained on the court even now from the war-ray chambers about the mighty cavern that was the home of the High Court of all Nor.

A startled expression stole over the majestic face of the ancient and wise Elder. Something unique in his tremendously long life experience had happened. The Nortan guard ray was not on duty. The court was unprotected by the ever-present guard rays that answered any summons of a citizen instantly he raised a hand. He knew instinctively that some great danger was

threatening Nor, for the watch and care of the system of security that had made their life inviolable was a fanatic religion with the Nortans.

The guard rays had not answered his summons instantly! A great and unexplainable weakness ran through his mighty frame as his mind struggled to think, and failed. He turned agonizedly to the officer of the guard, meaning to order an immediate search of the war-ray chambers for the source of the negligence. But only gasps came from his mouth in his efforts to explain to the Nor-Lords, the mightiest judicial talent in Nor, ranged in order of seniority.

Even as the Nortan faces turned incredulous eyes to the fallen might of their ruler, whom they revered as a God; even as their minds leaped to solve the question, "What could happen to the very center and peak of our strength, the apex of Nor might—to the awful array of weapons and Godlike men who guarded this, the heart of Nortan government?"—even as the people rose to flee from this impossible . . . this *mad* situation confronting them—their faces, too, went blank, and the great courtroom was peopled only by the fiercely grinning Jotun mariners of space. The empty-faced, mindless hulks of the God-Elders of Nor were all that remained in the court to rule the Nortan people. They sat as they had before; not dead, but victims of some terrible stroke of fate that had taken their minds and left only the despised Jotun pariahs thinking in a conscious way.

The Nor Elders were Gods—yet fallen victims of the despised Jotuns. It couldn't have happened to them—but it had.

Never, in all the history of the Elder worlds had such a thing happened. It had never even been imagined.

⁴ The penetrative rays used by the Nortans penetrate many miles of solid rock, giving a perfect visual image of anything within range, even through rock. By attachments to the apparatus, the penetra will also augment anyone's thought within the vision range, the conductive penetray acting as the aerial wire leading to the brain of the subject—the augment apparatus being similar to a radio, but tuned to the short-waves of thought.—Ed.

CHAPTER III

Vanue Discovers a Strange Thing

WHEN they revel in Nor, they revel! For they are healthy beyond anything mortals can conceive; they do not tire, and once started, the dancing and love-making go on for days. Among the people are always many returned from trips to far places never before heard of by the stay-at-homes; newly discovered planets full of strange life—or the far planets of the known Nor empire; and these voyagers are always surrounded by groups of ecstatic questioners.

Then, too, the art of entertainment is developed to a power beyond the ordinary meaning of the word. The highly developed minds, equipped with mind reading devices all their lives and expert in the use of mental image augmentors and projectors, knew in all the intricate variations and developments to which there is no end, all those images which in the mind arouse pleasure. The developing of such lines of thought is with them a science. So it is that dancing has a mental side with them far greater than mere physical movement. If you will analyze your own pleasure in a dance or other form of entertainment you will realize that much of it is entirely mental and could be produced by another mind. Using mental augmentation of image, a gathering in Nor is a different thing than a gathering among mortals. It is a gathering of powerful minds in full contact and awareness each of the other. The magic of mind, the pleasure of such meetings, is not understood except by those who have used mental image augmentors.

So it is that here on Nor other people's thoughts of one are more important than one's own appearance. One wears a mental impression of one's self

that is constantly modified by contact with others' thought about one, and any rents in that garment are instantly perceived by one's mind, to the hurt of one's ego. The effort to repair the damage done by one's own negligence toward others becomes automatic.

Thus, revelry among the Nortans includes a thought image projection contributed to by all. Each can direct a small personal ray onto the great thought clouds and contribute his part to the creation and exchange of erotic and other forms of images. Revelry under these conditions seems a dream in which everything that one wants or imagines is instantly fulfilled, because others notice one's thoughts and wishes, and answer them in a satisfying way—an endlessly entertaining way.

Life without mental intercourse is a sterile emptiness beside life with such intercourse. Any relationship is infinitely more satisfying under such conditions, as few mistakes are made, for each knows the other's wishes before they are really grown into full thought.

TONIGHT, in this concourse of keenly sensed minds, after months away from these, my friends, *I noticed alien thought!* No one but myself seemed aware of this alien presence, yet I sensed it strongly as I entered for the first time. The loved place my heart yearned for had changed. Something was terribly sickly different. I surmised it was a thing that had stolen upon the place so gradually that they were used to it before it was really strong enough to notice consciously. Something was horribly different—and the indifference to the change a sick feature of the change.

Of late years the thought image projectors had been reduced in size, so that tiny ones could be worn as part of the garment, and when a couple danced,

their thought images merged and played about them in all their revealing beauty. For mental nudity can be infinitely more glorious than mere beauty of the solid fleshly form. Such dancing, with the thought pictures visible and cloudily iridescent about their forms—being an innate and definite, an intricate and designed part of the body's rhythmic movement to the sound—was especially delightful for the onlookers.

I stood rapt in ecstatic awe of Vanue and her intended mate. He was a ruler from the heavy planets. He had come to Nor for no other reason than to seek out the beauty of the famous Vanue and find out if it was all report claimed. He had remained to pay his court. Instinctively I examined the man's thought intently, for I expected him to be the source of the alien presence I had sensed, but it was not true. Though he was from afar, there was about him none of the cloudy, destructive intent I had noticed as alien; none of the savage, parasitically lazy presence at all. He had Nor blood in his veins—or blood from some strain like the Nor—for his thought was not different in essentials than others, though much surer and finer than most.

I abandoned the idea. He was a fine fellow; a fit mate for even the mighty Vanue as far as I could see. His head was dark and curly and pressed close beside Vanue's cloud of gold, his mighty arm curled about her shoulders; and the flash of his teeth in laughter gave no savage hint of the thing I was dreading to find. He was a man. There was no thing I could find at fault in him.

As the dance broke up into groups watching Vanue and her partner, she noticed that everyone else was watching them and they ceased dancing in a burst of laughter like many falling crystal balls, laughing thought forms about them.

Still laughing, they drew toward one of the talking groups and I joined them, hoping to ask her about the alien presence I had sensed. She heard my seeking thought and answered, "I had not noticed, but now you mention it, I would say we have with us a spy ray, and have had for some time."

There was no more revelry for most of Vanue's following that night. She called her maidens to her, and ears burned. "Leave it to little Mion to smell out a stranger in our midst. What are you supposed to be doing—decorating the place with your charms only? No more dancing for any of you; get to work, every one, and find this thing—ray or person—whatever it may be."

SEARCHING the endless corridors and chambers of the Vanue borings and the neighboring caverns with great telaug beams, the swift-fingered helpers of my lady soon located the trouble. Strangely enough, the alien thought was found to source in several of their own number—which absolved them of blame, but did not help the explanation any.

The few found with that condition had not felt right for some time, a weakness having come upon them, and their thought had gradually changed from forms of the usual kind of their own making to alien and different thought forms not of their own creation. The girls' minds were probed for hours, but the strange trouble revealed no cause.

For some reason they were no longer themselves, but acted like different people—people with whom none of us were acquainted. They seemed like visitors from some far place and none too welcome visitors either. The two were taken to the great laboratories of the Vans in the depth of the great cavern palace of the family. Placed under the strongest thought augmentation their

science could devise, the phenomenon remained a puzzle.

Vanue was a high officer in the military organization of Nor, and her maidens were of various ranks under command, as well as many men like myself, who had chosen Vanue as our leader because of our admiration for her—in spite of prevailing Nor prejudice against serving under a woman. Because of this prejudice, which was ancient among the Nor, her organization was predominantly female. In a people who habitually conduct themselves by the observed thought of those about them, there is never any confusion as to who is to do what, and very little confusion over precedence or procedure, for some minds about always know what is best or accepted procedure, and one takes his cue from these minds. In this case Arl and I knew that Vanue expected us to stay and observe the search for the strange thought which had seemed like a spy ray, but which could not be understood now that we had found the source. This thought of Vanue's gave us the right to be in on the thing until its conclusion.

THERE were a dozen or more of us, now old friends of Vanue's following, about the great screens where the augmentive rays were slowly being concentrated upon each section of the suspect minds to find the source of the trouble. As the mech took thought record as well as micro-film photos of the thought activity, we soon had photographs, rolls of moving picture film, to enlarge and study.

It was a very strange mental landscape we looked upon—not at all like the less powerfully enlarged thought images normally handled by such methods. For Vanue had installed an ultra-powerful thought image enlarger to keep her laboratories ahead of the rest.

This machine reached down into the tiny world below the cell's field images and found the basic, the primary parts of the image, and brought them up to visibility. What one saw was not thought—but a square root of thought—tiny sections of what would have been full sized thought images had one seen the whole of it. Here the frail fringe of visibility in thought had been reached, and what one saw was to thought what a snow flake is to a snow drift.

As we slowed the rapidly rolling film to a snail's pace to observe more thoroughly the ultra-rapid movements which take place in the world of the ultra-small—we saw the frail fringe of fine thought-fibers—a chameleon-like effusion of the mind cells—looking like the dangling tentacles of air plants hung about the mighty trunks of the stronger cell fiber tentacles. Amid this strange and unworldly green gloom, like a great jungle of ever changing leaves, plants, grasses and trees, there were alien life forms—for suddenly and with a terrible fear clutching at our surprised thoughts we saw pale white faces peering forth from the mossy limbed and many trunked green gloom of the fantastic, fecund forest that is the small, micro world within a man.

"What are they?" I asked Vanue excitedly, for this kind of man life in the tiny micro world we were looking in upon was entirely a new thing to me.

"A thing I have often feared, since I knew it could exist, but which I never heard of before except in my imagination. It is a micro race, invading our bodies. We must all be quarantined until the danger has been fully understood."

THE great voice of Firko, the ruler of the planet called Falnorn, who was present as Vanue's intended, and had been her partner in the dance, here

broke in with concern:

"Vanne, my beloved, you would have heard of these and been prepared to meet this danger except for an obsolete law upon the ancient law books of my people. Upon Heavy Enn, the great Elder Planet around which my home Falnorn swings as a satellite—an experiment has been going on with a micro-man life form since a thousand years ago. But it has been kept in uttermost secrecy because the blind, untechnical keepers of the law would have suppressed the experiment. The law in question is a good one, but it reads: 'And no one may in any wise harm, injure, distort or in any way mutilate the unborn child with drugs, manipulations . . .'. Anyway, a law designed to protect the four-limbed state of the race against such things as the vari-form idea has operated to block all experiments with decreased birth sizes—which is the basic idea behind the work of which I speak. So of necessity it has remained a secret among my family and a few Elder scientists—but nevertheless an experiment in long term manipulation of the size of the young of man. Volunteer subjects among us who knew of the experiment, have given our seed to the scientists—who, subjecting the seed to certain drugs and vibrants in the incubation period—have brought forth dwarfs. The dwarfs, in turn, have been taught and bred to use certain drugs continually and their offspring in turn were smaller by far. After many centuries of persistent application of this method of reduction of birth size, we have—on Enn—a place we call 'Small Focli' where these little men have actually entered the microcosm.

"It is also true that some of the tiny race have grown dissatisfied and fled, at different periods in the past fifty years. Small Focli is a monster world, but to the eye it is only a block of marble,

bathed perpetually in strong beneficial green rays and drenched forever with a ruby nutrient liquid spray. Within it one of the great experiments of all time reaches its secret fruition. That fruition will mean endless new planes of expansion for all the God races.

"If we tell your lawmakers here of our discovery we will all be quarantined and kept here—while if I take my ship and go to the technical men of the secret circle who guard Small Focli on Heavy Enn, we will have the best help against this plague—for I have no doubt it will reach to the proportions of a plague in time. I think that these tiny men we see here parasitizing the minds of these maidens are descendants of those micro-men of Small Focli, who have fled the watchful eyes of the scientists to indulge their own ideas of how to live without work, as parasites of the rich and healthy bodies of greater man. It may also be true that some of those who escaped from Small Focli have fallen into the hands of evil men, who have brought the infection to Nor city—for purposes we may learn to our sorrow before we are through. This is not a minor discovery. An intelligent parasite of the tiny size we have observed may be a fearful opponent."

THE mighty bristled hand, on which the hair follicles bristled like the hairs on the skin of a young elephant, reached out and touched a control on the nearby film projector. The little faces we had been watching moved into a blur of speedy activity—and then could not be seen at all.

"Now they are moving at the normal speed and we cannot even see them. For time is to them much, much longer than to us, and the elapsed time since those micro-men fled from Heavy Enn has been to us but a few years, but to them eons of time. Watch the extreme ra-

pidity. That is why it was so hard to discover the source of the alien thought. This infection can spread through all Nor by the time I have traversed the void and brought from my home a counter force to wage a war upon this invisible, unreachable menace."

I opened my mouth, feeling like the fool rushing in upon the angel's fears:

"It sounds tremendously serious. Is it fatal—as fatal an event as my mind tells me it is?"

The noble, wise face of Vanue's beloved young ruler from the Elder planet of Enn gazed sadly down upon me.

"Serious is hardly word enough for the thing, my young friend. This could mean the death of man as we know him. Everything depends upon the attitude of the multitude of tiny races now living within Small Focli. Should they cast their lot with these parasites against their secret creators, it would very probably mean the end of Nortan life, at the least."

Tears rolled down Vanue's face as she talked, almost to herself: "That is why we did not discover them, eh? Their small size gives them a relative speed too great for our size life to perceive. They are infinitely beyond and ahead of our own rate of motion. They are invisible to us, but our apparatus has caught and frozen the motion so that at last they become visible to us. We must make endless amounts of such films until we know all there is to learn about this race—for this is an invasion of Nor life by a nearly invincible enemy—an enemy we may never defeat. I am not entirely sure there is no evil purpose, no agency of our own size behind this invasion."

The great voice of Firko of Falnorn was heavy with an urgency of anxiety for Vanue.

"Vanue, there is no time for such work. The only hope for your own

mind, for your own life—is to flee at once with me to Heavy Enn, there to get immediate help from the micro races of secret Small Focli. They can drive out these parasites, should they choose to do so. But we have no time to attack this thing with blind, experimental moves. If you stay here, your mind will be gone within days, for you have already been exposed to the infection—within hours you may be babbling like a child. Then, when you have been fully protected by an infusion of a sane and trained race of micro-men, we can return to Nor and proceed about the work of freeing the people of Nor from the last trace of the infection."

"Firko—" Vanue said, her voice showing her surprise that he should think her capable of abandoning her people, "Firko, my place is here. Take your ship, the *Black Prince*, and speed your course to Heavy Enn as only you can send a ship—as I have seen you drive in violation of all the rules ever made for space flight. Take with you Mutan Mion and Lady Arl. Take, too, those of my maidens who are infected, that the scientists of Enn can see what the invaders look like. Return as soon as you can, with all the help the vast science of Heavy Enn is capable of raising. I will stay here and do what I can. You are not to worry about me while you are gone, for I will be safer than you think. Now, the Gods speed you, my beloved, and may my love waiting here for you be the guarantee that you will return. And if you do return and successfully defeat this sudden horror that has beset the life of Nor, the answer you have been awaiting from me will be delayed no longer. I must remain; there are many reasons. Go, O my beloved."

Within minutes, the *Black Prince* was swinging its long nose aloft in the up-tilting launching cradle. Inside I was

strapping Arl into the acceleration seat. The "ready" alarm was ringing madly, warning all that to not prepare for instant acceleration would be deadly.

CHAPTER IV

The Death of a Nation of God-Like Men

BACK in the High Court, things had changed from the scene of a few days ago. Lolling in the great throne of chalcidony which was the ruler's throne of Justice, stretched the twisted, evil limbs of the Chief of the Jotuns. About him lounged the other members of his crew in grinning triumph. Beside them crouched the beautiful forms of Nor maids. Their eyes were blank pools of pain, their lovely floating hair now tangles of madness; their clothes that hung so irresistibly on the thrilling rounds of the limbs of the Norwomen trailed now in tatters, or not at all. On that too-white, too-luscious skin that is the mark of Nor blood, purple bruises bloomed where kicks or blows had shown the gratitude of the Jotuns for services rendered. But all the Nor maids humbled themselves in the same attitude of mindless obeisance to a master. Something had happened to them that left them obedient slaves. Over the great green marble floor raced the children of the Jotuns in mad play, while among them stumbled the great Nor men bearing food on trays, flagons of stimulative potions or priceless samples of the mechanical art of stim manufacture; or, quite often, leading a loved daughter or female relative for appraisal by one of the Jotuns. And on all the faces sat the same mindless, slavish expression as of a beaten dog—through all the many chambers of the great cavern.

"... and if we play our cards correctly"—the Chief of the Jotuns was ex-

pounding to his swarthy, intent followers— "the riches of all this soft nation of Nor will fall in our laps. When someone comes here, he will not be allowed to leave; when a ray from the city inquires—straightaway that ray dies at his meeb. And if anyone smells a rat—him they will send here first—and we will give him a hatful of our little friends to carry back to his friends with him. Ah, it was a lucky day I stumbled upon the micro race that fled from the great laboratories of some far world. And a luckier day when I noted on the pages of an ancient book with which I was starting a fire the details of the use of a similar race and the methods used to keep them under control. 'Life of the Microcosm', the book was called, and told how they had controlled and used the tiny life as a weapon. Long ago such life was used as a weapon by the race who rules space now; but the thing has been forgotten. The book told how the tiny life was trained to eat away the connecting tissues of the brain cells and so render an enemy witless. Why, those untold millions of little people hear my thought and obey it before I have even realized what it is myself. My thought has been their law, because I have shown them for so many years that in no other way can they win the rewards they crave and of which only I know the nature. Ah, many years I trained them to attack only the enemy. Now, I have my reward."

THE stupid, evil faces followed the words of the savage and cunning leader, sagely nodding agreement. "And to think that merely dropping a few quarts of the little people into the air shaft as we entered the court, would finish off every watch-ray guarding the court! Who would think they would be so well trained, so smart, as to at-

tack the watchers of the ray first—eh? Smarter than many men, those little ones."

"They *are* men, those little ones—and they think even faster than men, by far," mused the leader.

"How did you know, O Fenrir," asked one of the lounging lesser Jotuns, "just where that ventilator shaft led when you dropped the little ones into it?"

"Why, Rohat, a renegade from Nor law, took refuge with me years ago. He had worked on the boring of these tunnels. He had a plan of revenge on this court which outlawed him, and showed me the one place where gas dropped into the air tubes would take death to all the ray within. But I had a better thing than gas to drop into the tubes!" He laughed at the thought of it. "Are my little friends not a weapon, eh? The ancient books say there is no weapon to equal them for invisibility and for swift potency of effect. A bomb of micro life spreads, ever wider and wider, and it is not observed until it is too late. In the ancient days they used a micro-ant, but when I got these little men into my hands—then I knew I had the world at my feet. Within a week there will not be a whole mind left on all Nor. Every man, woman and child of the whole empire will be under our thumb then. Ah, the Jotuns will not joke then. They will rule space as did the Nor, till now. Let us drink to the future of the noble Jotuns. No longer the despised of space, but the warlords of all Nor-space."

The fierce Jotun Chief pounded the great horseshoe of the tribunal with the gavel. "Bring up the next case—" he bawled in rude mockery of the Nortan judges.

BEFORE him shuffled a mighty Elder of Nor, mindless now as were all

the Nortans for miles around the court buildings. The Jotun pushed him forward with many a buffet and kick.

"What is the charge?" bawled the mock judge. "For years this great windbag has thought himself superior to the Jotun. He has despised our race, and allowed us no rights but the rights accorded any dog. He has made no attempt to help our wretched life or release us from the evil habits which consume our health. He has forbidden any Nortan to mingle with or to teach the Jotun, for fear we could use the science we might learn to make trouble for him. Consequently we are ignorant of kindness, humanity, morality, or the dictates of our conscience. Consequently we are also ignorant of the necessity of keeping this great overstuffed fool alive longer. We have not learned justice or law or science of any kind from the Nortans, nor have we learned respect for the mighty work of art he thinks himself to be. I charge this great booby with criminal neglect of his self-interest in despising the Jotun."

The lounging outcasts of space shouted in laughter. "Criminal neglect of self-interest—ho-ho—that's rich, that's rare! Sentence him, judge; give him his dues, judge—"

"I sentence this overbearing rascal to a horrible deed, so that even his dim mind will perceive that horror is the result of his contempt for the Jotuns. He will be forced to eat the flesh of his own wife!"

* Among the Jotuns, the customary practice of the use of the growth devices they obtain from the ruined Elder cities is to overdevelop the women from childhood on. This overdevelopment of certain parts of the body results in an unbalance of the woman's system—and the consequence is a stupid creature of unusual appetites. To the Jotun's mind the women are so inferior that they eat the women in famine—then obtain others when relief comes. Their women are bought and sold like cattle—as among the blacks of Africa.—Ed.

A young, nearly good looking Jotun stepped forth at this stage of the "trial."

"O my wise leader—" he began in the usual formality of the Jotun; "may I be granted permission to plead the case of this man—as well as the case of all these prisoners of ours?"

"Speak on," growled the leader, not paying much attention, for he was fondling the waist of a young, dazed Nor woman.

"FELLOW outcasts and comrade pirates," began the youngster; "I am acquainted with the fact that the poor always blame the mighty for their ills. I am also aware that the mighty are seldom aware of the ills of the poor. For centuries past we have watched these Nor men grow and prosper, while we have lived on the crumbs from their rich life. It is true that they have never offered us a share in their prosperity—we have always ignored us as unfit for the rights of citizenry.

"But I plead that they have never been cruel or consciously antagonistic to us. They have never realized the enormity of their offenses against us. But their contempt has resulted in a denial of our right to live—for our primitive state has made us unable to compete with their advanced methods of production of the things of life. This contempt has resulted directly in our poverty, and consequently in our devious and piratical methods of obtaining the things in life which we must have.

"I think it was this same contempt of the contents of our minds which made possible the trick by which we gained control of this, the nerve center of Nor city. In return for their contempt, we have succeeded in robbing these Nortans of their minds. I suggest that we Jotuns take a lesson from

the unconscious cruelty of the Nortans, and have more mercy, more consideration for these our defeated overlords, than they ever had for us. By acting mercifully in this, our opportunity, other men of space who might be our enemies will take counsel and say, 'Why hate and despise these Jotuns? They are wiser and more merciful than were ever the mighty Nortan race. Let us aid them, and they may aid us in time of need!'"

THE leader scowled down upon the young and comparatively well favored warrior. "Such words are always to be found in the mouths of the young, the foolish and the woman-minded. They were also to be found in the mouths of the Nortan teachers. I, your Chief, have thought and studied long upon such words of supposed wisdom. I say the law of the jungles of the life worlds (sun-planet life) is the only law—and all other laws are fools' creations and do not fit the facts of life. The strong must eat the weak, and the ant-horde will swiftly eat the strong if he is not able to run away.

"I say such things point the way of wisdom. It is our duty to destroy this race called the Nortans, root and branch, so that we may live. They have never left us room or opportunity in all space we have been able to reach—they have got there first and their industry has absorbed all opportunity down to the bare bones. So we lived on bones. If we coddle them now, they will hate us just the same because we made fools of them; as we have, literally. Sooner or later they will rise against us, for our ways are not their ways, nor even can be.

"I say this over-stuffed and over-proud mollycoddle should be made to eat his own wife, as his own despise for us has made many of us eat our own

wives, as is our custom during famine. It was their monopolies of all things in space made me eat my own wife long ago. What do you despised worms of the cold voids say?"

The Chief cast his eyes upon these followers of his; fierce, wild, cunning eyes, that had long led them and kept them from the many traps that would have destroyed their freebooting life. Their minds had long followed his decisions. Almost to a man they roared approbation of his bloody counsel.

The young Jotun stepped down sadly from the low dais he had ascended to make his entreaty for the life of the Nortans. Some of them had been kind to him in the far past; he could not hate the beautiful Nor men or Nor women.

But love and wisdom are not things that grow well in the de-light from worn-out cavern city stimulative beneficial ray mechanisms, or decaying ben-ray mech, and these men of the Jotuns had the evil of dis-electric in the cores of their minds. He was learning the hardest lesson that wisdom has to teach—the basic upon which all true wisdom rests. That is: thought which seems correct is not correct if it is tainted with dis-electric, but thought so tainted convinces men who are also tainted inwardly with dis-electric charges, even though to a clean man the way of wisdom is quite clear. He was learning again the thing that wisdom must ever learn before it is wisdom—that men are not governed by thought or logic, but only seem to be so governed to the casual eye.*

SO the young and noble-minded Jotun stepped down sadly and watched with sick eyes while the great mindless Godman before them was given a knife and made to carve great chunks of flesh from the living, screaming, fully conscious body of his own wife and

eat the boody meat before them all. The Jotun at the control rays making the great one do this deed laughed with pleasure as the deed was done.

But the young Jotun knew that such monstrous sport would bring all organized life in space against them, for he knew something of the vast power of the Elder life of Nor and the nature of their allies, which the Chief and his ignorant men did not know. He knew that their tenure on Nor would be short. He saw the drunkenness and neglect of obvious measures for their safety; the failure to contact all other Jotun groups and bring them at once to invest the city with a mighty force of fighting men—on the excuse that to do so would cost them the best of the city's loot. He knew they were doomed; that the leader was overconfident of his cunning that had served them so well in the past.

The Jotun leader, Fenrir, thought that he could hold the center of Nor

* Men are governed by the interior induction of two penetrative forces about them, which shapes the intent of their thought. The disintegrant force gives destructive intent thought, while the integrative force electric gives creative, good intent thought. Ever the two intents, the two dissimilar patterns of thought must war, so long as men obey them, and both kinds of thought seem perfectly correct to those who think them. The well-intended Jotun was young and uninfected with dis-force patterning of his intent, for by chance the ray mech of his childhood home had been fairly new and unused when the greater races had abandoned the cavern to his own despised Jotun race. Such ben-rays grow a mind whose thought is love and creative effort, for little disintegrance penetrates the integrant fields of the beneficial rays to cause distortion of the thought into evil intent. The Jotun dimly perceived this fundamental difference between his own thought and the thought of such men as his leader. The young Jotun knew there was an unreconcilable conflict of the patterns of thought about him. One day he would perceive the immense drive behind these thought patterns from the powerful induction from all space source forces upon the minds of men—which gives rise to the two forms of thought which cause men's endless strife and seeming necessity for the killing of other men.—Ed.

with a pretense over the telerays that they were the Elder Nor themselves, and save the inquiring rays of the Nor-patrol with the message that all Nor city was stricken with a terrible plague, so that none might enter safely, which was true enough. The Chief expected that simple orders over the long range rays to remain away from Nor for fear of the plague would keep them in safety till the riches of the city would fall in their hands.

It was a bold scheme, but it contained too many holes for error, too many places where the overconfidence of the Chief expected his tricks to carry them through. He did not know that the Nor-patrol were used to impersonating people by talking through a thought record of the person impersonated, and would detect their trick immediately. There were many such items he was in ignorance about, but then, he had succeeded so far—why worry? Success is a heady drug, and it takes a great deal of it to give immunity to its effects. The Jotun leader had always led a hunted and unsuccessful life. This was his first great coup. True, they had taken many ships, but never a great city before. The young Jotun knew it would be the last one, and planned for mercy for them accordingly, but to no avail.

CHAPTER V

Vanue's Supreme Sacrifice

THE resourceful Vanue did not waste time waiting for problematical help from the vast heavy worlds, of which Enn was one. The huge laboratory in the palace that was her home became a scene of fierce activity—a mighty effort to beat the ultra-rapid life of the micro race with intelligent and precise effort. Her maidens searched the minds

of all within range of her rays in the great city. When an infected one was found, he was brought to the laboratory, and his mind kept continuously recording the mental images—which were then slowed down and carefully observed for some clue as to how the tiny race of voracious, parasitic men might be counter attacked. Soon she had hundreds of patients, and had to stop bringing them in, as the access of fresh numbers of micro-men cut her own time of sanity lower still. By the observed rate of the infection in her blood she had but a few days at the most. Then she would become a shambling thing of no mind, as bad so many of her race. Vanue did not know that at any time the Jotun Chief might learn of her and send a fresh horde of little men to stop her mind forever. So she worked on, nor thought of flight.

THE micro-men were not at all self supporting, but existed entirely by feeding on the nutrient fluids brought to the cells by the blood capillaries. They traveled from victim to victim by several methods. One way was in the colored crystal balls, which were in truth the micro-man's cities, and varied in size from tiny invisible crystals to great city globes the size of marbles and quite visible. Sometimes these micro race cities appeared in huge swellings on the arm of a patient, the swelling broke, the glittering marble emerged and rolled by some means she could not learn toward a better, fresher victim. One thing she noticed particularly was that there were two distinct types of micro-men. One kind of tiny man showed evidences of recent and strict training, a military precision of procedure and a smart, almost intelligent order about his life. The second type was wholly primitive and appeared never to have beard of any organiza-

tion or discipline of any kind. Just what this difference signified she could not decide.

As time crept on, the hours of her feverish activity mounted toward the total she had set as the last limit of her consciousness. As the loss of her mind approached, which time she had gauged by observing the progress of the disease in others, taking her own blood count and comparing it with theirs—she realized that Firko was right, that it would have been wiser to flee and return with full preparation to fight the menace, for no ordinary methods prevailed. But Vanue was stubborn and a woman, and would not admit that truth to herself. Keenly calculating the time left her, she set about the plan she had intended to follow when she sent her beloved away.

"I shall infect these little lives with the virus of usefulness," said Vanue to herself, smiling sadly.

So she set thousands of separate cultures of the little people under a thousand separate kinds of pleasure rays, for she had noted that the intense pleasure they experienced had slowed their voracious spread through the flesh of the victim. She accordingly immersed her own body in the intense pleasure rays, knowing that she had prolonged her time allotment.

Then she varied the conditions of life for the invisible race, with a vengeance. With all her vast knowledge of beneficial rays, vibrants, nutrients and nutrient energy flows, she put her thousand sample colonies of the little people under a thousand separate sets of conditions. Some were provided with every possible nutrient to increase their size and vigor, others were placed under constantly varying detrimental vibrations and constantly varying forms of nutrient, so that nothing existed for them that they could depend on but

their own efforts to bring some kind of order out of the induced chaos Vanue made of their life's fixed pattern.

OTHERS she dosed with intent vibrants — strong thought record augments of intent and simple logic forms. When she got them well into it she had a dozen different types of development of the little men whose capabilities under the magnifying lenses and augmenting mech, as recorded on film, showed ways of living that even the magnificent imaginations of the Nor scientists had not glimpsed. Now Vanue crossed all the best products of her intensive development of the race and produced a race of manifold potentialities—of sparkling, fecund mental powers. To top it, they had attained a scientific development beyond anything she had thought possible in the time she had allowed for the job.

Now she was ready to communicate with the race she had created. Time was short, and in her mind she visioned Firko spiralling down to the surface of his own small world where it circled the mighty weight of the vast planet Heavy Enn. With thought record of scientists at work building and repairing mental augmentation equipment, she powered the micro waves she had used to induce beneficial intent in the little men, with the thought record of apparatus creation, until the little men were forced by the overpowering thought flows to build likewise—were robots to the great strength of the thought sent into their micro world. Thus they built thought augmentors with the intense speed with which they moved, and within minutes after she started the effort to communicate with them, they were talking to her through a slowed down record of their own thought. The fecundity and power of the little race told her something about

hybrid races, for the race was a hybrid of several nearly distinct strains she had bred and isolated. It told her that Nor men were wrong when they frowned on crossing Nor blood with other races. The weakness of Nor was vastly plainer to her now. They needed new blood, it was true.

Now Vanue gave the little men she had created from a savage parasite, weapons, and began to train them in their use. These men of hers had forgotten their savagery and had imbibed the loyalty and love she had taught them, with an encouraging enthusiasm. Her vast need for their effort she carefully explained to them, and then her fading mind lost track of their furious, all-embracing effort in a fog of sick emptiness. . . .

THEN the blow fell. It fell like an ax upon her efforts for the life of Nor. An order from the ruler of all Nor—a huge, official looking parchment with the official seal was brought to her by a squad of Nortan guards from the great barracks near the central court. The order forbade all work on the experiment with the micro race, saying that any such experiments were apt to invigorate and make more dangerous the terrible plague, and that the official scientists of the Nortan government had been empowered to keep all such work under strict observation. Full counter measures were being taken, and all other work was to cease until it had been thoroughly checked by the Nortan government scientists in control of disease. The phrasing of the order would have told the real Vanue exactly what was up, but the growing fog in her mind made the official command and the subsequent forcible locking of her laboratories by the armed guards, who took up sentry duty at the entrances, a death blow to her efforts.

The mists in Vanue's mighty brain lifted momentarily in her sudden anger at the official stupidity arising against her in this terrible emergency, and her rebellion made her swift hands conceal several vials of the micro-men cultures in her bosom as she left the laboratory for the last time.

In her sleeping chamber, Vanue wearily activated the great vision ray at her bedside and swept its all-seeing eye over the great dying city that was her home. Softly, steadily, she wept at what her eyes successively revealed to her. The activity, the gay, ambitious, vaulting life of Nor was gone,—dead. Instead of the busy libraries, the swarms of students, the speeding ships of commerce, the busy ways jammed with rollats; instead of all the beautiful and intense life of Nor there existed a slow moving people with dull, empty faces like masks. Not even despair lived in their faces, for they had not the sense left to realize their plight.

Knowing that within short minutes, perhaps, she herself would be one with the stupid horde that had been the race of Nor, with fumbling motions she took a hypodermic from the drawer, inserted it in the vial of micro-men culture, and shot the teeming life into her arm. As she slipped to the floor and oblivion she was praying silently—"May love and loyalty serve Nor this day, even in the veins of these little men whose father race destroys us. . . ."

Would these cultured little men she had spent her last strength upon defeat, if they could, the intelligence she realized must be directing the rape of the Nor race? Dimly she knew that somewhere in the city the author of this vast doom on her loved people was gloating with triumph. Or had her activity been so closely observed that there was truly no hope for anyone on Nor; no hope but that speeding ship

the *Black Prince*, now far, far out in space. . . ?

As she lost consciousness, she murmured—"Is this, then, the death of all the noble effort of the Nor race? The Gods, then, are cruel, and not the men I think them."

CHAPTER VI

Mutan Sees the World of the Elder Gods

AFTER long days in ultra-rapid traverse of the void, Firko braked the ship around the heaviest planet I had observed yet, and spiraled down to the surface of a glittering plastic enclosed satellite of the great world called Heavy Enn. This glittering little world was his ancient ancestral home, Falnorn.

It had been a passage dominated by the powerful mind of Firko, ruler of the planetoid below us. He knew every possible orbit of every possible variation of our course, and the perilous precision with which his great, black mossed hands throttled the jets to full "On" whenever the grav needles wavered to a zone of weightlessness about us, froze us to our seats with both fear and suddenly acquired acceleration velocity.

His handling of the huge *Black Prince* was a thing more admirable in a pilot than I had ever seen. Under ordinary circumstances, the chances he took would have resulted rightly in a loss of the right to pilot a ship for life, if reported officially. But in this horrible emergency, with the life of a nation depending on the speed with which we made the trip, I could but grip my seat arms and fearfully admire his grim, ironjawed control, which proved far superior to any robot pilot ever constructed, for we beat the usual time for the trip by half. If he had misjudged the application of full power to the jets

by the slightest hairsbreadth, or failed to shut off the acceleration power the instant the renewed gravity field wavered the grav-dial needles, we would have been crushed to a thin smear by the fearful power in the mighty jets of the *Black Prince* against the invisible wall of the rushing force that is gravity. But in those thin zones in the center of the attraction of two bodies, no matter how far off or how near, exist certain hard-to-find lines of neutralization of gravity where the opposed flows of gravitons leave a totally weightless line of no gravity. There a pilot can accelerate to the full power of a ship's generators, and the resulting velocity will not harm a fly after the acceleration is shut off. Neither can the acceleration harm anyone if it is applied in the exact center of the weightless zones. To do this fine calculation of position with respect to the invisible force fields of gravity merely by closely watching the wavering needles of the grav indicators, was a feat I had never seen attempted. But Firko had fine coordination of hand and eye, as well as the iron nerve the feat required, and we came through with nothing but a few bruises for the lot of us. Our nerves did not fare so well. I still tremble at the thought of those iron hands hurling our lives against the fearful force.

WE LANDED on Falnorn's glittering envelope of plastic, which sealed out the cold of space and sealed in the artificial warmth of the great heat generators of the surface. The reason for the variance from the traditional method of building far below the surface where the rock furnishes perfect insulation as well as warmth for the life within, was the fact that Firko's family, the Falnorns, were astronomers, students of the vast dark

spaces and the bodies that whirl forever through it,—and the dark caverns below the surface, while more practical for most life, were for them just so many more obstacles between them and their chosen calling. On Falnorn, alone of all the worlds of dark space I had seen, the dwellings were built on the surface.

Below, through the clear plastic roof of their world, we could see the towering, black, almost cyclopean homes of the great family of Falnorn. For nearly all within the plastic shell of the world of Falnorn were relatives by blood or marriage. Strangely decorated in shining gold, the great black buildings were alien to us. Above us glowed the ruddy globe of Heavy Enn, ruddy because of the myriad of inner lit city globes, which were plastic globes over the great cavern city entrances—so many of them that the whole planet glowed redly from a distance. The light was red because the beneficial rays of the Enn beneficial were predominantly in the red of the spectrum.

We were admitted to the inner warmth under the insulating transparency by a great circular trap, that opened its disc ahead of the *Black Prince*. Gently the great bulk of our ship lowered toward the buildings beneath. About the alien beauty of the buildings was the familiar beauty of columnar cedars of great age, mirrored in the long ovals of reflecting pools. This place was beautiful with the work of an age of loving hands serving the Falnorns because they were proud of working for them.

The pools reflected, too, the far brilliance of the myriad stars, and the red globe overhead that was the monster world of Heavy Enn. But no one who has studied under the Gods of the Darkness can appreciate the light of stars with any ecstatic reaction, for he knows

the evil they bring to life under their light. Always in one's mind is a rebellion against the blind working of the dumb mechanisms of energy, bringing life into being on globes like the earth, where disintegration from its evil sun makes all its days miserable and its end the horrible, leprous shrivelling that is age. And on those cold worlds where disintegration is a negligible quantity, there energy does not birth life spontaneously, for the frigid cold does not generate life. But deep in the caverns burrowed in the warm interior of such globes, it is perhaps there, in some similar natural cavern that life such as first led to man came into being, and from there spread to the evil swamps of the sun-blasted planets, and to the burning deserts where disintegration rules life action.

BUT the brilliant ruddy globe of Heavy Enn overhead was not such a depressing sight as the far stars, glittering with the studding, inner lit glass covered entrances to the deep cavern homes. Enn was an inspiring sight above us, filling a good quarter of the sky, and bringing enticing visions of the beauty of the life that we should soon see there.

It is good to look at such a sight as Enn from afar, and know that every sparkling stud upon its mighty body is the entrance to a city swarming with life of the highest intelligence, life that will never die or cease to grow. The thought of the beauty of all the women in those cities and the knowledge that they are truly immortal—brings to consciousness the awareness that love, and immortality to enjoy it, are truly the goal of Gods, a goal they have won.

Firko led us into his home. A mighty, tissue-vibrating force shook us as we entered the vast chambers. I knew it was the chamber beneficial, here ex-

panded to fill all the chambers of the great buildings. What power in the generators that hummed under the great towers of the mighty structures! The ecstasy of entering beneficial force after the emptiness of the void of outer space is unexpressible.

About the corridors we traversed was a thing I had not seen before,—moving statues. They were tremendous, of some flexible glass-like stuff, and lit by the streams of invigorating vi-rays, of which they were the local source—as a radiator serves in an earth home. Their motile bodies moved slowly through an everlasting dance of ever more and more attractive form, and the statues were related by the pattern to each other, seeming to be an endless ballet along the corridors. The mechanisms of their motions could not be seen, as the translucent substance of the bodies was not quite revealing as to the core of them. This slow, interrelated motion of these breathtaking sculptures was the most interesting thing I saw on Falnorn, for we were not there for long.

FIRKO had sent ahead warning of the dangerous character of the infection we bore within us. So there was no life to be seen, and we knew that those parts of the buildings entered by us would be hermetically sealed after we had gone, and gassed heavily with disinfectant. We did not pause long to enjoy the beauty of our surroundings, for we all felt a lot like lepers stealing a way into paradise, and we did not feel particularly welcome.

Firko broke out several flacons of a potion he called "the perfection of a million years of difficult art—of an effort toward the complete nutrient." It was wonderfully flavored liquid, and we drank all we could hold. It gave us immediate strength, and more in-

tense and brilliantly colored thought than we had had for weeks. All of us had been dulled by the progressing fecundity of the numbers of multiplying micro-men within us.

Picking up certain instruments whose use I couldn't fathom, as well as spending some time checking over his data on the micro race with his father's talking image over the televisor, Firko led us at last out to the bangars again. Leaving the *Black Prince*, whose weight was too great to approach any heavy planet like Enn, we entered a smaller ship which seemed mainly made up of power generators and huge jets, and so upward again toward the ruddy sparkling globe of the mighty world called Enn above us.

Shortly we were spiralling slowly down toward one of the red glittering spots on Enn which were, in most cases, the entrances to the oldest cities in all this dark galaxy. Our ship, as it neared one vast city home of these oldest of Elders, seemed to me comparatively the size of a gnat making a landing on South America.

The vast, circular air lock doors gaped for us, and we were swallowed up in myriad overwhelming sensations as the mental examination of the watchers for the Gods of Enn sent the impressions from the God-minds over the telaug rays and gave us a swift glimpse of the scintillant, infinite beauty of the endlessly complex thought within their minds. This place was to Nor as a technological college is to a kindergarten.

CHAPTER VII

Vanue Falls into the Hands of the Jotuns

HOURS later Vanue awoke. After releasing her invisible race of micro-men upon whom she had spent so

many hours, hours which she had expected to be her last, she had at last lost consciousness from the inroads of the alien horde of savage life. Her last act had been to pull a hypodermic syringe full of the micro race of her own culture and plunge the teeming life into her own arm.

Sitting up, Vanue rose and stood before her great round mirror from the art-city Loni. Slowly her hands rose and began their habitual motions of dressing the vast cloud of fine-fibred, floating golden hair which was her delight and the envy of all the would-be beautiful of the Nor empire. The forms of her rounded shoulders, the great soft arms lifting and parting the strands of glimmering gold, were a pleasure to her in the shadowed round of the mirror. The green emeralds of her eyes watched with a strange new delight all the many beauties that made up the mighty unsurpassed splendour of symmetry that was Vanue. The soft delicate bloom of her skin, the long lashes shadowing her eyes, the great long-fingered hands that were so swift, so sure at their simple task—all seemed entirely new and unendingly delightful possessions to Vanue. The micro race she had bred and inserted in her own blood had never before been out of their crystal prison.

For the first time in weeks Vanue lifted her voice in song—

"I am Vanue, the flame of the mind's desire.

I am Vanue, the beauty of life's fierce fire.

*I sing awareness of my white body,
my round arms, long limbs and
soft hair—*

*I sing awareness of red lips, of
smooth cheeks, and a lover's stare.*

*I sing of swift moving hands and
sure and graceful feet.*

*I sing Vanue, who was a slave, is
free for e'er!"*

Suddenly, as the meaning of her words sank into her newly awakened mind, Vanue started, and stared at herself in the great, shadowed roundness of the mirror. It was her voice, but she had never sung such a song, in praise of herself; she would not have thought it seemly. Her voice stopped in a sudden sound of glad surprise as she realized that her own race of little people had taken possession of her mind's cells, and the song had been their way of announcing their presence to her—and of their victory over the savage life that had been stealing her mind. The song was pure joy of living, and a song of freedom and gladness from the little people at finding their new home so entirely lovely.

So she was herself again, all the leaping joy of life again streaming through her veins, and more besides—a new glad awareness of self as of one just released from prison. The glad question formed on her lips and a soft little answer was born in her mind, deep in her inner self:

"We have released our mistress, and we will guard you always. O beloved Goddess, we dwell in you now, and always will love our home and guard its freedom which you gave us this night."

Her micro race had proved true, had proved able; and entered and freed her forever from the parasitic micro race which had nearly succeeded in robbing her of mental life, as they had done to nearly all of the Nor.

For the first time in weeks, hope lifted its head in her heart.

Failing to guess what might be awaiting her, Vanue dressed with care, and left her home . . .

Her destination was the great inner caverns where the supreme ruler of Nor

made his home and held his highest court. She could not understand why the usual emergency council of all the best minds of Nor had not been summoned. She felt it was her duty to consult with the ruler about the measures taken against the micro-invasion and to acquaint him with the success of her own efforts at finding a counter micro race to use against the invading parasitic race. She was also furious at the great Elder's order for her to cease these successful experiments, and meant to tell him off in her own way, now that she had succeeded in her experiments.

WHEN she entered the mighty chamber of the God-head's dwelling, she stopped short, aghast, and turned swiftly to retreat, but too late!

Seated before the great horseshoe tribunal where the mighty ruler held his court was an outlander. A forty-foot, monstrously ugly fellow, black-bearded and swarthy. Before him a powerful telaug and visor had been set up, and with it he was watching the thought of the uniformed city guard, Nor men all. These he was using to police the deluded city. They were not free-thinking men any longer, but were under his control. Not as directly as the Nortan and Atlan method of overpowering thought augmentation imposed upon the mind—but indirectly, through the members of his micro race whom he had kept under micro wave compulsion for years, preparing for an event such as the taking of Nor city. By the use of his radio-controlled micro-men, he could keep those who followed him free of the wild, savage, parasitic micro-men he had loosed upon the city.

Vanue deduced the whole set-up as she looked at him and the tell-tale apparatus about him. Even as she looked, she felt the stings as millions of tiny craft entered her skin bearing the more

highly developed micro-men whom the Jotun Chief had brought under his control. Within her consciousness she sensed the fierce battle for possession of her mind and nerves going on between her own cultured micro race and those shock troops of the micro-invasion.

Within seconds she sank to the floor, her motor nerves cut by the new invasion of her body, but she was still conscious, for the new invaders were obeying the orders of the Jotun Chief over the telaug, and he did not wish her mind destroyed, as he wanted to watch her despair as she realized the hopelessness of the Nor position. Too, the micro race of her own creation were holding her mind centers valiantly, but the coincidence between the Jotun Chief's orders and their own attempt to protect Vanue's mind kept them from his notice. The black-bearded chief laughed triumphantly as the greatest beauty in all Nor sank helpless at his feet.

"So! The pride of the Nor finds her master—" his voice roared gleefully. "Take her to the women's quarters and put her into the super-stim, along with the others we are preparing for sale. She will have more regard for the Jotun, and less pride, when she has had a taste of Jotun science."

THE great court had been turned into a mad feasting room, with the best blood of all Nor as the slaves of the feast—slaves without mind except as the micro-men ruled them; ruled in turn by the strong waves of micro thought broadcast by the instruments of the Jotun leader.

Vanue had heard of the secret cruelty of the Jotuns—but now she realized what had been meant. The Jotuns, by their control of the minds of the Nor men, were making the great God-like

race kill each other in every vile way they could conceive.

Here, a Lord of a neighboring planet was ravishing his own daughter, while at the same time he was made to inject a rank poison into her veins from a huge syringe. Then both the victims were made suddenly aware of their acts by evacuating the controlled micro-men from their minds—too late. They saw the things they had done and their mental agony of horror at the acts of their own hands was greatly enjoyed by the sprawling Jotsuns over the powerful telaugs, which broadcast the whole thought sequence to their minds.

There a great oldster was operating on his own wife, pulling out her organs one by one and examining them with bloody, unfeeling hands, while her fully conscious screams rent the air; and as she died the Elder was made fully conscious of his acts—and the deluge of mental anguish made the Jotuns howl with laughter.

The smaller and more comely females had been put aside to be placed in culture fluid vats and wired to stimulative and nutrient growth promoting energy flows and vibrants, to develop them in the way that the Jotuns found most attractive in their women. Also many of them would find their way to the vast pleasure palaces which surround the civilized areas of space—to pander to the fierce lusts of the pioneers of space.

The Jotun women, who are not good looking enough for the pleasure palaces, as well as many of the victims of these palaces, are mindless creatures for the most part, but with vastly developed, over-developed emotions and desires from the concentrated growth rays and stimulating vibrants directed wholly at the nerves of pleasure. Under the potent growth methods the Jotuns had picked up about the borders of the technical civilizations, they did produce a fearful,

overwhelming development and a figure fiercely attractive to the savage wanderers of the far spaces—at the expense of their other qualities.

THROUGH the heavy murk that the debauch had made of the air of the great chamber moved the hapless Nortans on errands for the Jotuns, bearing drink or the fine, infinitely valuable portable stim devices which were a most sought-for product of Nortan science; also drugs of the endlessly stimulating and pleasant varieties known to the Nor, as well as special foods of a number of kinds, which had been collected from everywhere about the city for the use of these creatures. Moving aimlessly, some of the unfortunate Nortans had suffered great wounds which poured out their life blood over their heaving sides as they struggled on, dying even as they moved to serve their conquerors.

The peculiarly overdeveloped women of the Jotuns moved through the steamy atmosphere, smelling rankly of the powerful, exotic perfumes from the ends of space, that they had found in the Nor ladies' houndoirs and poured over themselves; embracing first this man, then that one, or one of the bemused Nortans; it made no difference, for the Jotuns are not moral.

The smoke of their cooking fires which they built anywhere, regardless of whether it would destroy a great painting or ruin a statue, contributed its part to the murk that swirled everywhere. Like the savages they were, everywhere was the smell of blood and the sprawled and pitifully mutilated bodies of the immortals of the fallen city of Nor. The stench from the unclean bodies of the savage invaders, with their children hawling and shrieking madly in their play through the whole mad scene, the smell of spilled

wines and medical health potions which the Nor make in endless and irresistible varieties, overpowered the senses. Again and again a strong mixed perfume from the body of some maniacally amorous Jotun woman looking for another, yet another partner, mixed with the mingled and opposed sensations through the god-like luxury of the chambers about the High Court, in a steam like turkish bath, or a night club gone mad.

THROUGH the eddying gloom of steam, the smoke, and the vapors of wine and perfume, moved the debauchees—who were rapidly becoming too drunk to walk. Still they milled and crawled one over the other, seeking yet one more sensation, driven on by the powerful stim rays which the Jotuns had activated to their highest power. These stim machines were the most valued loot of the pirates. This powerful influence pervaded the steamy atmosphere with an irresistible impulse, a compulsion toward pleasure, driving the whole throng on and on to madder and madder longings for the satisfaction of the terrible urge which such stimulation arouses—ever the Jotuns crawled over one another like a molling mess of mad beasts in some vast saturnalia.

Vanue, herself beginning to feel the terrible and unnatural strength of the pervading stimulating currents through all the conductive atmosphere and moisture-drenched air of the room, her mind staggering again into the blank darkness from the steady influx of the antagonistic micro life obeying the leader's command from the teleradio compulsion to destroy all Nor life, all Nor thought, to attack all things Nortan, had yet a horrified vision of what she would become in this pit of horror, for she knew there would be no end to this terrible way of life. From what she had heard of the Jotuns, it was their normal life.

They plunged into this sort of endless debauch under their unnaturally overpowered use of the stimulating rays whenever they got hold of the stim mechanisms and their debauches lasted until the mechanisms wore out from overuse. It was their way of life, but this time she knew their Chief had engineered the death of the Nortan people in order to indulge his taste for unending debauch. She wondered dimly how many other lovely cities would be ravished by this particular bunch of pirates.

CHAPTER VIII

Mion and Firko on the Heavy Planet, Enn

FIRKO brought the tiny ship to rest on Heavy Enn, and I and Arl, and the maidens of Vanue eased ourselves painfully out, for the gravity of Enn is not for unaccustomed muscles.

They were awaiting us, and seemed not to have the fear of the infection which had characterized our landing on Falnorn, now but a shining blue dot below us. A party was going on, to welcome us; at least it seemed like a party to us, who did not know the life of Enn is an endless kind of Nirvana for all of them.

As we entered the vast chamber each of us was handed a tiny stimulator belt, which, at the press of a button, emanated a ray which exhilarated and communicated with the one aimed at. The huge chamber itself was loaded with conductive and stimulating vibrants of a vastly superior kind to those we were accustomed to, and I realized that Nor was really a "corny" backwater to the intense life of these greater Elder God races.

The animal magnetism of the throng, augmented by the devices in the belts we had been given, flooded the room

with the delightful sensing of the presence of the opposite sex. There were many there no larger than our own comparatively diminutive selves, but they were a minority—really but children. The odour music played its silent beauty, while a master-organ of both sound and basic vibrants of thought-record augments filled the place with both unobtrusive music and God-thought, woven into a pattern of meaning that was immense in its effect of something vastly greater than beauty.

A female friend of Firko's—a relative—took us in her huge hands and presented us to the larger of those present, the relatives of the families of Falnorn, for the most part.

The purpose of our visit—aid for the micro-invasion—formed the topic of most of the conversation around us, but why didn't they take it more seriously? I at first didn't understand it. Then I heard snatches of talk about the Small Focil experiment, and I realized that these were the people who were in on the secret of the existence of Small Focil, and hence were the only people who had no cause to fear a savage micro race, for their own highly cultured micro race would be able to protect them from any number of the savages. Besides, the danger from the tiny life was something they had foreseen for years and were prepared for.

THEIR micro race was a thing they had worked on for centuries, and the people they had created were from their own blood, the children of artificially created dwarfs, whose children were in turn treated both in the womb and in childhood, until at last they had what they wanted—a race small enough to enter the invisible world below magnification's reach. As the size had begun to be an obstacle in communication and in other ways, the tiny ones had

been trained in the administration of the growth retarding potions. This teaching was an essential part of "sending" into the small—a thing they knew would be of no use unless those sent into the small were trained scientists of several kinds.

As the little fellows grew, the process formed naturally into steps of sizes surrounding Small Focil. The whole experiment took up a vast cavern, roughly circular in shape, where as you progressed toward the center the people grew smaller and smaller, until, as you reached the center—that is, if you were allowed to enter—as no one of normal size was allowed to more than approach the entrance to the cavern of the small—you would have found a people of the size of ants, and in the very center of all, a place where nothing could be seen, but which was the crown of the whole effort—the people who had reached microscopic size.

As this small and smaller size was reached, the time element became involved, for the smaller men were, the swifter did they grow and reproduce. And in the ultra-small world the generations flashed by as one breathed a breath. Of course, these small creatures were also immortal under the conditions of life they had been taught to reproduce by the full-size men, and would gradually grow up out of their smallness and move out into the larger circles of life in the circular cavern. But this was not a problem as yet.

The enterprise was so young that there were no full-sized men yet evolved from the minute beginnings. It would take many thousands of years for the ultra-small men to grow into full-sized men. But size is so variant a thing on the Elder God planets that a standard size man is hardly a concept used by them. Size depends on several variable factors: the age-size of the parents at

birth, those parents' choice of nutrients and synthetic gland extracts for the young, as well as their choice and knowledge of the infinitely complex science which their beneficial ray development has become. There are beneficial rays which increase the health of a cell without influencing its size; others influence the growth of the cells. Then there are the synthetic gland products manufactured by the Elder God race. They can influence growth, intelligence and strength in the young by subjecting some glands and organs to a more intense radiation from beneficial energy flows.

IN THE ultra-small world within the sacred, rapidly evolving center of the cavern, age had absolutely no recognizable relation to anything one usually associates with age in man. This much I gathered from the conversation about the ultra-small world we were to visit—when a great Elder called Fantarn picked us up and started off with us to the very place my ears were endeavoring to learn about.

As he walked his great voice boomed above us:

"The micro-world is fast becoming the important part of our life—and we huge monsters are becoming but the agents and the robots of the smaller ones. We hear them about, we care for them, but they do the thinking and the accomplishment with their ultra-rapid thought, before we can even conceive what is happening. And when at last they grow up to God size from the small world again, they will be in truth Gods of wisdom, and not the great lumbering beasts we are become in our growth."

I piped a polite return to his great voice:

"The small men have need of our size—and our need of their rapidity of thought and science work will form a

bond between the two worlds. It should make a great race team, the macro-men and the micro-men—will it not, O mighty Elder?"

"They are developing a type of men that can live in our bodies as these men-germs you bear in your body can live, but without using our life force except as a hook to hang their dwellings upon. These parasites you bear and which are wiping out Nor city planet,* are renegades from those experiments, who saw an easy way of life without effort, and fled by using their minuteness as a way of getting away. Where they have been since they fled we know not—but now they show up as horrible parasites, I gather that the micro race needs our size and ancient solidity of life pattern, and I shall make sure that they do not develop any such way of life. It is one reason I am taking you to Small Focii, to show them the actual living parasites you bear which once were men—but a short lifetime ago to us—but an eon to them. Mayhap the unwisdom of the results will teach others of them who are tempted to become parasites.

"Yes, we have a great need of them—and I am glad to have this to show them, so that they may become more aware of our wisdom, slow as it may seem to them. Yes, it will make a mighty life team. No microbe will have the effrontery to push a nose beneath the skin of a man so tenanted. After all, we can move a billion of their worlds with one hand. The Elder Empire will expand as never before, though perhaps to outward seeming we will not grow at all. We are learning to make the most of what we have now, and the outward growth into space, with all its inconvenience of adoption to heavier and heavier worlds—will cease. When it comes again we will be faced by no enemies capable of stopping us, and

by no inconvenience—for we will have by then developed inner strength and resilience that will make our limbs able to bear the step by step progress. In time the use of heavier and heavier planets to bear us may cease altogether, as more and more of our children enter the small worlds instead of choosing full size life. Our problems will be much simplified."

SMALL Focii itself was but a block of marble, ten or twelve feet by twenty, and as wide. Over it glowed several great lamps of the red beneficial of Enn, and down upon it streamed a vaporized bath of nutrients. The formulas for both these beneficial rays and the nutrient vapor were numerous, and had been worked out by the small people and put into operation over the block of marble. Within it we knew a myriad of minute people lived—each molecule a home—or in the size range developing now, perhaps a planet full of people lived in each molecule. Around the block a fury of work went on. Ant sized people worked at apparatus too small to make out, and handed up to bird size people a steady stream of tiny papers, which they in turn copied and handed up to cat size people, and so on. They were copying and enlarging photostats of documents, formulas, books of philosophy, and systems of philosophy (which occupied a large part of the time of the little people, in their attempts to improve the logic of the big people, who were a worry to them, with their poorly patterned and apparently so slow thought, with its ill-formed patterns which they heard constantly over their tiny telaugs, the size showing up all defects to their microscope mental vision in a most revealing light).

One of our first comments to the little people was that they should organize

an expedition to go into the minds of the particular great people who were such illogical thinkers and correct the illogical condition in person—with or without the knowledge of the patient. They made no answer, but I could not help but think that they must have thought favorably of the suggestion.

As an answer they sent up a small bit of material for both Arl and myself. With it was a sheet of instructions: "Place these bits of rock in an enduring gold sheathing, such as a locket or ring, and wear it constantly. A coronet is the perfect thing for the body position of the tiny race we have sent into your care. When things go ill with you, the tiny race within the gold ornament will hear of it and find a way out of your troubles for you. These are real good luck charms; they are a nation given into your keeping. You will never lack for correct thought on a problem before you—so long as you care for this gift. In effect it is an ultra-rapid, auxiliary brain—which is in truth many, many brains, whose time is so much more rapid than your own that many lives can be spent by them upon a problem taking you but seconds to propound. The container of the bones of the little ones must be bathed regularly in certain nutrients and placed under certain beneficial rays for a time."

ARL and I were soon quicker of thought, and we had not even mentioned the plague we bore within us; but I could vision the battle going on within my body as my old quickness returned.

Then came what we were so impatiently awaiting—a series of similar bits of matter for Firko, who had had his own reports of the micro-invasion photographed and sent down to the little ones. The instructions went to him

and he tarried no longer in this so pleasant atmosphere. He remembered the straits in which he had left Vanue, with her fate in the efforts of her own hands, and little chance of success. The little people seemed to have given him some kind of assurance that he would need no more, for he did not wait for an expedition which was forming to go to the aid of Nor, but leaped into the tiny ship we had arrived in—and we after him.

The time we took in burning the ether to Falnorn was negligible, but somehow as long, quite as long, as I care to spend hurtling between two worlds at such an uncomfortable speed. Into the *Black Prince* we piled, and off into the night that has no end. Firko reduced the time of our trip another fraction of time, but we were sorely bruised by the acceleration bursts, which he could stand easily, for we were not so tough.

CHAPTER IX

Mutan Mion Returns to a Fallen Nor

THE *Black Prince* swept in a great spiral to the frozen valley above Nor. The locks that should have opened for us opened not; there was no friendly beam bearing laughing conversation to us, no movement or loved voices to be noted anywhere below. We settled to earth, the liquid air flying in great spumes about us, and putting on space suits, with long and sorrowful faces we prepared to enter the unopened gates of Nor. We all knew that only the greatest of calamities could have caused such negligence. The race must be dead—the powerful, immortal race of the Nor must have succumbed to the tiny invaders without a chance to struggle.

We struggled with the tiny individual

locks which are always at the side of the great space lock valves. Without too much quibble I burned the lock out in the swift arc of a dis-ray. Once in, we opened the great discs for the *Black Prince*, and the ship floated slowly in with a quiet that accented the heavy funereal feeling that pervaded everything.

I leaped to the great vision ray, and swung it from its position staring at the skies, to sweep the inner caverns. Nor was a city of walking dead. About the streets staggered and plodded a few of the mightiest men of Nor, but their faces were blank and foolish. They were not men at all, but empty headed wrecks.

Not waiting for any more ceremony, I opened the valves of the inner locks, and boarding again the *Black Prince*, we set her gliding rapidly above the cavern city, looking with sick eyes at the death of all we had held dear for so long. The place was untouched by signs of struggle, but there were hardly any people to be seen about. With the penetra, we found most of the missing sitting in their homes, motionless, staring at nothing. Within their minds our telaug beams found no thought at all. They would all die from lack of volition if help did not come to them soon.

As we floated the big ship down the streets, we saw entirely too many Jotuns. I counted hundreds of the creatures, before I suddenly realized that the great number of Jotuns and their healthy appearance was significant beside the wretched, stumbling, mindless wrecks which were the remnants of the Nor.

THERE was no place to set the huge ship down in the streets, so we finally put the *Black Prince* on the sod before the massive pillars of the High Court. In and out of the great open

valves of the doors poured a throng of Jotuns. Many of them were drunk, and none of them were respectful as we pushed our way through them into the great hall. On the High Seat of the Mighty Elder of all Nor sat a Jotun. About the great, luxurious place—the architectural crown of the effort of an immortal race—reeled a mob of drunken Jotuns. Every man's arm was about a beauty of Nor, and every man's foot was in the face of a prostrate Nortan. If they were not prostrate it would have been better if they had been, for they were shuffling about in answer to the bawled orders of their masters, and every time they passed a Jotun, they got a kick—which added up to more punishment than lying on the floor.

As they entered the great room, Firko's huge body jutting out of the swirling mob, the monstrous Jotun on the high seat saw him, and hawled: "Disarm those men—are you all drunk? Hop to it!" About them flashed into action the great flame swords worn by the Jotuns.

"Back to the ship!" Firko's mighty voice bellowed and his dis-gun needled swiftly right and left. The lancing fires of the flame swords burned past us, but the consummate swiftness that was Firko's heritage from his great parents kept his swift ray always a hair ahead of the clumsier Jotun weapon, and as they backed from the great doorway a ray from the black hulk of the *Black Prince* blotted out the life pouring from the entrance—blotted the Jotuns out in a great burst of fierce, sparkling dis. We raced up the spider walk into the lock of the *Black Prince*, and the jets knocked great holes in the smooth lawn as the ship shot into the ways again. If we had known Vanue was among the victims of that stew of lust in the great court building, would we have fled

—or sat right there and shot it out? I think Firko would have died before he left them the field, with Vanue a prisoner. We shot through the tubes at reckless speed. They were not built for either the speed or the size of the ship Firko piloted, but his seemed a sure hand at any job.

We swung into the great tubes that led to Vanue's home, and settled softly upon the roof of her palace. The place was a wreck. It had been ransacked from the upper sleeping chambers to the storehouses in the basement, and sprawled among the wreckage of the looters were a dozen fat and ugly Jotun women, sleeping off the effects of a prolonged indulgence in nutrient potions, liquors, and overpowered stim.

Above us the great space radio of the *Black Prince* went into action, broadcasting the information over a dozen bands used by the space patrol as well as commercial lines. About us the crew of the ship moved swiftly, setting up battle ray from the store-rooms—making of the place a fortress.

Firko went back to the ship on the roof and sent a code message to be relayed by any ship within hearing, to Enn. I did not doubt that that message meant the end of the race of the Jotuns, wherever the mighty reach of the vast Elder Planet's League, of which Enn was not a small member—could find them.

CHAPTER X

Vanue Among the Jotuns

AMONG the Jotuns, Vanue's awakened brain was again darkening into the imbecility that the savage little slaves of the Jotun leader brought so quickly to those his thought indicated as victims. They did this by

infesting the brain cells with millions upon millions of their colonies—propelled invisibly through the air by their tiny crystal ballships. Once in the brain, they cut into all the nerve cells of the nerve fibers connecting the brain cells—so that thought ceased in the infected brain. The brain cells were not destroyed, but they were unable to communicate with other brain cells—and thought is not the product of a single cell, but the multi-product of millions of brain cells adding up their life experience in ultra-rapid communication.

Vanue's last thoughts were directed toward the race of tiny men whom she had developed in her own laboratories, and whose efforts had freed her once before from the mind-darkening invaders. What had happened to them? Had they been overwhelmed by the savagery and numbers of these micro-men who were closest to the source of the evil will behind the micro-invasion of Nor life?

Even as she questioned herself her answer came, for without volition of her own she caught up a harp where it lay in the litter of the floor and a song lifted on the noisome air of the great hall.

*"Flames and blood, war and death—
Normen taste the dark waters of
Lethe—
But Nor shall rise again!"*

As her clear and God-lovely voice lifted over the hubbub of the debauch, within her mind the shadows lifted slowly and clear thought began to flow again within her. She realized that the little race who had taken up their life within her body had been but temporarily set back by the vast numbers of the invaders. She would have given a dozen pearls from Lae to have seen that war

within her body on the augmentor of thought images.

The race she had developed must in truth be vastly superior to that brought by the Jotuns, for they had not taken long to clear her mind of the second thought-eclipsing invasion.

AS FENRIR, the Jotun Chief, heard her voice, his anger rose.

"Take her to the woman's quarters, I say. What means this delay?"

Vanue was borne from the room just before the entrance of Firko and the Nor men. This brief but fierce encounter was followed by sudden activity by the Jotuns. Fenrir realized his life depended on the events of the next few hours, for his hold upon Nor rested wholly on keeping the state of affairs in the city a secret from the rest of the Empire and the Nor-patrol. Fenrir was but little acquainted with the fact of the existence of the Elder League, of which Enn was a member. He had no real education, and the vastness of the civilization of which Nor was but one small part was not a thing he could conceive or grasp.

The Jotuns leaped to man the rays which were in great war-ray rooms everywhere about the vast caverns, of which the Nor court was the center. Great bolts of flame and lightning darted after the departed *Black Prince*, but the ship was not built on Nor and seemed impervious to their fire, if indeed they struck the target. A great black cone of "shorter" protected the ship's flight, and their rays did not pierce that cone of power.

"Jotuns are coming from all our holdings in space to live in Nor; we will not be alone to face the power that ship will summon," growled the Jotun Chief, but he was shaking with fear. That ship, and its escape from their clutches, was the slip he had not intended to make.

But his undisciplined men had been drunk and not at their posts, or it would never have landed unobserved. The Jotun betook himself to the chambers of the women to console himself with the beautiful Nortan, Vanue.

IN THE women's quarters Vanue had been placed upon a table and over her the greatest stim rays the Jotuns had found in the city were activated. Such had been the Chief's orders, and the women of the Jotuns do as they are told. The terrible current poured through her body with its overwhelming command to the organs and nerves, a command far superior to the will in strength. Her body writhed slowly into rhythmic motions, and sweat broke out on her noble face as she resisted the overpowering synthetic nerve impulses with every atom of strength in her power.

Again and again her strong and huge arms broke the straps that bound her to the "forcing table," but the numbers of the Jotun men and women about were too much for even her great God-strength. They only bound her again under the mighty rays and watched her utterly perfect body as the stimulation of the nerves went on and on, building up within her body a vast potential of energy, unnatural but overwhelming to the will.

Fenrir entered, rubbing his hands together at sight of the writhing body of Vanue. A fit sacrifice to the Gods who had brought his great success upon him; a fit reward for all he had accomplished lately; the finest booty in all Nor, the famous Vanue—his to do with as he wished. He was but half her size, and utterly hideous to her eyes.

Hideous as it was to her, her body was his; that body she had preened so long, knowing that one day it would be irresistible to some mighty one from

the Elder planets. And now Firko had come, seeking a fit mate in the famous Vanue, and finding her all that fame had painted her. Her own heart had found at last the perfect counterpart for which she had prepared herself for centuries. Now the effort of all that time and life had to go—to this mongrel from the pits of Jotun filth. Tears of rage blinded her.

CHAPTER XI

The Battle for Nor City

THE SPACE radio was belching replies from a thousand separate space stations as the unbelievable news of the degradation and eclipse of the Nor state reached them.

"We will arrive as fast as drivers will place us there."

"We will scuttle those vermin's bid for power if it is the last thing we do."

"Hold that Vanue home—we will be there within an hour."

On and on went the furious words from the farflung ports of all space—and I realized that only the stupid Jotuns were capable of putting themselves on as hot a spot as that group within the capitol chambers now sat upon.

But some of them warned us—"The Jotuns are numerous, and may have been preparing this coup for many years—their ships are seen and reported from many places—all headed for Nor planet. Do not make any more mistakes."

He warned them all in turn of the micro race which had been the weapon to turn the Nor race into slavish imbeciles—and at least we knew that no more opportunity would be given to a Jotun to infect a civilized man with the savage little beings who had laid low the lords of all Nor's empire.

So it was that space around the planet

Nor became a Hell of blazing rays, a tornado of battling ships, as the Jotuns arrived from their hidden boles, and the Nor-patrol ships, as well as friendly warships from a dozen smaller nations streamed steadily in to take a hand. The groups of fighting forces were not evenly matched; there was no way to tell who had the power. The ancient ships of the Jotuns performed surprisingly well. It was evident they had been preparing this coup for some time. But as the flow of ships from all civilized space kept increasing, the influx of greedy Jotun looters decreased, for news travels fast, and they had no stomach for a fight to the finish.

We watched the whirl of battling spacers from our visions screen in Vanue's home—itching to get the *Black Prince* out and into it—but knowing the place we held would be needed as a base for operations against the Jotun-held great borings of the court buildings.

AS THE incoming friendly ships reached the proportions of an overwhelming avalanche of strength, the Jotun ships broke their clumsy formation and fled in every direction—and the pursuing, faster and lighter ships of the Patrol cut them down. At last the skies above Nor were clear again. The Jotun rebellion was over. Clever from beginning to end, as their attempt had been, they had made the Nor look foolish to all the peoples of space. It would be an age before the prestige of the Nor had regained its former value. I for one suspected it would do them much good to realize that for every lock there is a key—and for every man a fatal weakness. Our weakness had been our overconfidence, resulting in laxity and failure to foresee trouble when it stared us in the face. It would be a long time before Nor lifted that over-proud head again.

Now came trundling down the ways the ranks of the patrol; small ray tanks from the ships; great tanks from the cities' arsenals; and over them drifting the great bulks of the smaller patrol vessels which were small enough to enter the standard size borings of the great cavern city.

Within hours from the time we sent the first message announcing Nor's plight, the court borings were completely sealed off, and the ray tanks creeping closer and closer to the great doors. Out of the pillared buildings flamed steadily the defensive ray with which the place was equipped, but our "shorter" rendered it valueless to the Jotuns.

Then the Jotuns tried the weapon which had given into their hands the great lords of Nor: the tiny glittering marbles which housed the myriads of micro-men. These they sent on tiny mechanical airplanes which they had evidently long prepared for the purpose—and I knew it was their belief that we would fall before it as had the great and ancient rulers in the High Court. But we were well warned—and as the tiny planes swept toward us, dropping the glittering marbles of mind-destroying life, our needle rays sought out the planes and burned them down. From every hand ray in the army about us flamed upward the dis-needles, and the swarms of glittering little mechanical birds never reached a man of the army, with the monstrous micro-life.

AS THE planes fell, their load of venom spilled out over the soils of Nor, but watchful eyes swept the area of the infection again and again with flaming dis at full strength, and every falling plane met earth only to be blasted to fragments and the earth burned away for many yards where it fell. If any of the micro race lived, they

weren't numerous enough to cause us injury. Ever closer and closer to the great doors our ray tanks rolled, and the black curtain of "shorter" before the doors began to glow lighter and lighter as the overload burned away the ground connections, unit after unit.

Now our dancing dis-needles from the small tanks had started their dance of unison. Their concentrated fire would lance here and there together—never where the Jotuns would expect it—and every time the needles met at the base of a blazing lance of ray—that time one ray crew of Jotuns died—cut in two by the irresistible force of many rays meeting in one point. There was possible to science no defense against such tactics but greater agility of hand in meeting the force needles with greater "shorter" force concentrations—and this mass fencing of many rays and "shorter" beams to protect or penetrate is one of the most thrilling sights of ray warfare; utterly unpredictable and utterly disastrous if the defending hands are slower than the attackers. The Jotuns were slower, it appeared. It was not long before their defenses were down; the great valves swung open before us as a magnetic ray behind us pulled on the metal of the doors.

The heavily armored ray tanks lumbered slowly into the great court room, grinding in short circles as their periscopes peered for the defenders. They were few—and they stood with their weapons piled before them, their hands crossed on their chests—the customary posture of surrender. Everywhere lay the swarthy, ugly, bandylegged bodies of the Jotuns, and also everywhere lay the white bodies of the mightiest men of all Nor, now fallen. For the Jotuns had used the mindless captives as fighters, manning the rays with the "things" they had made of Gods.

Firko found Vanue, still bound to the

great forcing table, the stim rays going full blast. But Vanue was unconscious and moaning from the effect of the terrific over-stimulation. As Firko took the mighty beauty of my leader in his arms, tears coursed down my cheeks, for Vanue opened her eyes—and her eyes were sane and full of that balanced self that I worshipped.

SOME time later, when the mess had been cleared up and Nor was beginning to look as though people lived in it again, Vanue, Arl and myself were discussing the peculiar weakness of the Nor race as it had shown itself in this micro-invasion. Arl got the bit between her teeth and you should have heard her:

"Vanue, the Nor are stuck on themselves—and they are not what they think they are. Something vital is missing from the make-up of the state. It lacks some vital element. They despised the crude and ugly Jotuns for years—and one ship-load of Jotuns take the whole capital apart and nearly took over the government of Nor. Regardless of the fact that Nor was taken by a stratagem and not by open assault, my eyes are opened. Nor has been good to me—you are my ideal of a leader—but my eyes are opened. I am going with Firko to his home near Enn and I am going to learn what ails such states as Nor, and I am going to learn enough to do something about it. And until I know that Nor is really superior to such things as the Jotuns, in every way—I am going to have nothing more to do with her. Even if only with some of the micro race you have given me—I am going to create a perfect state—and one in which a swelled head will never grow."

I admire Arl's spunk when she gets riled—and her sentiments were nearly my own. There was too much official

"ivory tower" about Nor leaders' thought, too much indolence and pleasure seeking in their make-up. There was too much keeping of official science secrets from the minds of people who could have developed such things—too much static force about Nor thought. So I agreed with Arl, particularly as I had no intention of losing her.

"I agree wholly with my wife's statements," I said, winking slightly at Vanue, "and I am going to Enn with her—to protect her from any ideas that I, too, have a swelled head and am really inferior to a Jotun. That is, providing Firko will have me."

Firko laughed and answered, "You are all welcome in my home Falnorn—for as long as you wish to stay—be it days or centuries. But just what makes you think that Vanue is staying here in ravished Nor? My wife is not going to be allowed to stay in a place which has failed to protect her from—of all things—a Jotun. She has agreed to accompany me to Falnorn and take up her duties as my wife and the queen of my board. So, if you do not wish to leave your loved leader, I see no other course open to those who love Vanue but to accompany her to my home—until that day comes when Nor needs us again.

Vanue smiled her great smile that makes every man's knees shake who sees it, and lifted her glass.

"To our future; may it grow till we can say—we are truly superior to the Jotun race."

SADLY we drank to the death of the swelled head of the Nortans, and to our future under Vanue and Firko of Falnorn. For a great part of the Nor men of the city were dead—and the rest would not be of much account for a long time. Perhaps the straight

view of our duty was to stay and help rebuild the city, but so many other angles entered into our calculations. It was better for all of us to leave the scene of the death of so many beloved—but in each of our hearts was the resolve to return when we had the knowledge necessary to rebuild Nor as it should be rebuilt. And there was truth in our sad renunciation of the famous Nortan pride—for in truth it had had a fatal weakness, and the Jotuns had unerringly sensed this weakness. That weakness was the over-confidence that left the nerve center of all Nor open to such a simple subterfuge as dumping a few quarts of fierce micro-organisms in the air intakes of the central government buildings. That all Nor should have been fooled by the appearance of stupidity natural to the Jotuns—that their minds should have been so uninteresting to all Nor men as to have caused the failure to perceive the sinister intents motivating them—that Jotun junk ships should have penetrated the Nor patrol to the very gates of Nor city—all these things had turned my love and admiration for the Nor race into a wonder and hatred of the kind of thought which had produced such weakness. A self disgust that I myself had thought the Nortan system of life so perfect; that those Elders whom I had worshipped as Gods so short a time ago, should now be dead at the hands of Jotun idiocy had made me hate and fear all evil—yes—but it had also made me fear and despise soft, easy life and ways of thought that left no room for caution. Well, a burned child dreads the fire, and is careful around a fire thereafter. I hoped the whole race of the Nortans realized the significance of this affair and learned from it never to underestimate an enemy or omit a precaution. Myself still followed the ascendant star

of my lady Vanue. And for Firko's conduct during the whole time, I had the utmost admiration. I now had two leaders—and not fools. The future looked bright for me.

The tiny bits of matter which Firko had brought from Small Focli we placed, according to his directions from the little people, in great hospital rooms where the sick of the still-living Nortans were brought. The patients were treated for one day and night, then were returned to their homes to make room for others.

Their recovery after exposure to the cleansing micro-life from Heavy Enn was remarkable. The tiny, invisible men from Small Focli must have been redoubtable fighters, or had equipped themselves with weapons vastly superior to anything the savage race of the Jotun culture could obtain. For during the exposure to a chamber in which a bit of the matter from Small Focli was placed, the Nortans recovered their wits almost entirely. Firko assured me that as the connecting nerve fibers be-

tween the brain cells healed completely, they would be nearly as intelligent as before their infection. But it would be a long, long time before Nor city assumed its old magnificence and joyous ways of life.

I suspect that the whole affair had been good for those who lived through the thing. For never again would a Nor man be taken by surprise, not so long as the memory of the Jotun rebellion lived. Never again, under any conditions, would an unchecked mind with an inimical intent enter a Nortan stronghold. And I knew that Arl and I, and perhaps Firko and Vanue, would one day return to live again in Nor, for love does not die.

☆ ☆ ☆

*... Morn,
Waked by the circling hours, with rosy
hand
Unbarred the Mount of God. There is
a cove
Within the Mount, just by his throne ...
John Milton*



LIFE IS SIMPLE

By HOBART M. GIBSON



WATER always flows downhill. It is the natural thing to do. We never give things credit—or blame—for seeking a lower level. Instead, we know that a force of electrical or magnetic force is always exerting a pull on it.

The late Dr. Crile, finally, had to admit that our life force was electrical. Other leading heads in the science, relating to life, have said the same. For life to be anything but a form of electricity, all natural laws would have to be broken. The bricks, or basic forms of all matter are electricity. All things earthy are electrical. Everything we receive from space, including rays of sunlight, are electrical; so, the essence of life—no matter what we consider it—must feed on electricity. There is nothing else possible for food.

A storage battery is a form of man-made life. Being man-made it does not possess life of its own. It has no process of its own whereby it can draw on the air or earth to replace the electricity it expends in doing the work that man gives it to do. Man must furnish a generating outfit to keep the battery recharged or else it runs down and dies.

Destiny-planned life is self sustaining! We will ignore that and consider only animal life, as it is our main legacy. The writer has had some well-known doctors tell him that protein was the base of animal life. It is strange what mistaken notions otherwise brilliant men can have. We would live, probably, several days if all the protein in our blood was suddenly removed. If the carbon in our blood was removed we would die within a few

minutes. Into oxygen. Life is based on these two essentials.

Assuming that carbon is the fuel of life, and that oxygen is essential to its utilization, we will go on to show that LIFE IS SIMPLE, as the title of this article suggests.

When we speak of carbon as a fuel, what do we mean? Is some part of carbon destroyed or removed to produce heat and energy? If so, carbon would be the living entity and our bodies would be a form of insensate material. Carbon would be the wonder and our bodies the commonplace.

Our life force is electrical. Carbon is nothing but a mass of positive and negative electricity. There is nothing in carbon that our bodies could want or could get—except electricity. Which brings us to the question: if we take electricity from carbon and give nothing in return would not plant life be the wonder and animal life the commonplace, inasmuch as plant life would, then, be the restorer and animal life would be the robber and recipient. Natural laws may be harsh, but they are always just. Nature never takes without giving an equal amount in return.

THE cells of the body take a charge of electricity from the atoms of carbon and must—to keep from breaking the inflexible law of nature—give something in return. The cells are built up of electricity. Their work is electrical. They have nothing to give in exchange, except electricity. There would seem to be no advantage in trading an amount of electricity for an equal amount of electricity, but there happen to be two kinds of electricity. We are familiar with them; magnetic and generated. One forms a potentially permanent circuit while the other has a tendency to discharge itself in useful—or otherwise—work.

The Deity-planned cell has the power to use electricity and retain it in the form of magnetic force, so that when the cell receives a charge of electricity from an atom of carbon it has an equal quantity of magnetic force to give in exchange. Upon sober thought, one will have to admit that the cell could not go on, indefinitely, creating the magnetic force circuits that bind the carbon and oxygen together in carbon-dioxide.

To digress a moment, why is oxygen essential to the use of carbon? An electrical motor will not receive the current from a generator with only one lead. There must be a positive and a negative lead. Man uses wire as leads. Nature uses oxygen. A bolt of lightning cannot be discharged from a cloud until the earth has sent up

a magnetic force and aligned a positive and negative lead of oxygen reaching from the earth to the cloud. There is plenty more to be said along that line, but space forbids.

Carbon, when freed from the compound (carbon-dioxide), always carries an excess charge of electricity. The body cell is sensitive to the charge of electricity carried by the carbon, so when carbon enters the cell—if oxygen is present in a sufficient quantity—the cell sends out a magnetic force that aligns the oxygen into a positive lead and a negative lead. The excess load of magnetic force that the cell carries travels up the negative lead to the carbon and forces the carbon to discharge its excess charge of electricity along the positive lead into the cell. The magnetic force follows the electricity to the cell, trying to form a closed circuit through the two leads. The cell now being well fed spurns the magnetic force, so the closed circuit embraces only the two leads and the atom of carbon. Thus carbon-dioxide is formed and thus it will remain until it is used as plant food.

ANIMAL life is really very simple. It is nothing but an electrical unit. One that receives electricity as needed from carbon, and gives an equal amount of magnetic force in return. Magnetic force which a plant, by chemical action, changes to electrical force. When the plant does that, it breathes the oxygen out and uses the carbon as building blocks.

There is no more mystery to the life force of man than there is to lightning. Consider it in this way. A sperm of electricity is picked up by vapor. Conditions are right for its growth. It grows and expands until it is ready for birth. At its birth, the cloud travails until a passage is formed, so that the sperm can be transmitted back to earth. A sperm of electricity is introduced to an ovum. Conditions are right for its growth. It grows and expands until it is ready for birth. At its birth the mother travails until an animal is born into this world.

Man tries to create life in the laboratory. A useless effort. Life is always free to start growing. All that it needs is a unit, such as the mother gives. Life is the natural thing for all planets, stars, moons, meteors and meteorites. All that is necessary is an atmosphere. It does not necessarily have to be composed of 21% oxygen and 79% nitrogen. Life is very tenacious, and would evolve to suit an atmosphere of almost any degree or percentage of these two gases.

THE END

BUY VICTORY BONDS

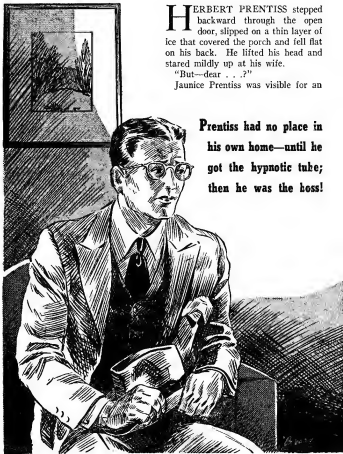
"ANYTHING YOU

HERBERT PRENTISS stepped backward through the open door, slipped on a thin layer of ice that covered the porch and fell flat on his back. He lifted his head and stared mildly up at his wife.

"But—dear . . .?"

Jaunice Prentiss was visible for an

Prentiss had no place in his own home—until he got the hypnotic tube; then he was the boss!



SAY, DEAR''

instant in the open door. Then the door slammed. In that instant, she had ample time to shout at him.

"And *stay* out until you can learn to treat me civilly."

Herbert Prentiss sat up slowly. He rubbed the back of his thinly covered scalp, brushed his felt hat and placed

it back on his head. It was very cold out here and he hadn't had time to don his overcoat. The door was opening again.

Something hit Herbert Prentiss, covering his head and shoulders. Jaunice's voice boomed again.

"And this time *I mean it.*"

By
**LEROY
YERXA**

"This is a very potent hypnotic tube," said Dr. Browne. "It will give you courage."



Herbert Prentiss sighed and a loving smile lighted his pale face. Jaunice really did love him. Hadn't she been thoughtful enough to throw out his coat also?

He arose a little unsteadily and put it on. The sleeves were frayed and the collar was slightly on the thin side. He was grateful, however, for its protection.

Just what had caused the quarrel this morning Herbert Prentiss wasn't sure. They quarreled every morning. There had been a time, many years ago, when Mr. Prentiss might have done something about the way he was pushed around by his wife. With the years, Herbert had grown thin, had adapted a defeatist attitude and learned to accept what came with a smile. He was thankful that it wasn't worse.

His attitude did much to make Jaunice worse. She lived on her fat and allowed Herbert to carry all the burdens. Herbert Prentiss was a hen-pecked husband. He was more than that; he was pecked, clawed, chewed and digested. Nothing remained but his thin, nervous body and a mind that definitely wasn't his own.

PRENTISS rounded the house slowly and entered the garage. It was heated and he often came out here after one of Jaunice's spells. The garage this morning was not deserted. Pete was working at the tool bench pounding with a big hammer and trying to drown out the horrible sound by singing loudly. He was singing the Volga Boatman and with the steady, rhythmic beat of the hammer, the effect was terrific. Pete was Jaunice's brother. He had come to live with them ten years ago. He had overstayed the visit, but was thinking about leaving almost any day; or so he had told Herbert every week for the past decade.

Pete looked up as the chill blast of winter wind followed Herbert into the shop. He stopped singing and a scowl wrinkled over his ruddy face.

"Shut that door. It costs money to heat this joint. Besides, I can't stand cold air."

"Good morning, Peter," Herbert said. "It's a nice morning."

He longed to remind Peter that it was *his* coal that burned so merrily in the little cast iron stove. That Peter had the privilege of leaving at any time. He shuddered at the thought of expressing himself in this manner.

"It *ain't* a good morning," Pete said, and started to pound again. "It's a lousy morning and I ain't in a good mood. Go peddle your papers."

Pete started singing again. All he knew was the first line. He sang it with such deep feeling that one imagined he had spent many years along the banks of that famous river.

"The Volga Boatman—

The Volga bo-aatmaaan—

Ya—ya—yaaa—Ya—ya—ya"

Herbert Prentiss was discouraged. Also, he was growing impatient. Something stirred inside of him. A bit of the beast that had remained caged for so long it could only snarl weakly, tightened his fists. He sighed again. He just couldn't tell people what he thought.

Discouraged by continued attempts on Pete's part to add something to the boatman song, Herbert opened the door and backed out. He stopped outside long enough to see Pete turn and scowl in his direction. Then the hammer was thumping steadily again and Pete was singing his lament. Herbert Prentiss turned and timidly approached the outside entrance to the basement.

JOEY, Herbert's teen-aged son looked up from the model airplane and his

eyes narrowed at the sight of his father coming slowly down the stairs by way of the outside entrance. One could almost see the hair on the back of Joey's neck sit up. One could sense that if he were a tom cat, his back would arch in fury. Joey slipped off the stool on which he had been sitting, pushed the model plane far back on the bench in a gesture of defense and turned on his father. His hands sought his hips and poised there, fists clenched.

Herbert Prentiss advanced half way across the ash-strewn floor of the basement and stopped. His eyes were a bit watery from the cold air outside.

"Good morning, Joey," he said. It was a timid greeting. He never knew how Joey would react.

"You heel," Joey said with great feeling.

"Hub?" Herbert's mild eyes opened wider.

"I said, you heel," Joey repeated. "I heard you and Mom fighting up stairs. I heard you break her heart and leave her crying."

That couldn't be entirely accurate, Herbert thought. Jaunice wasn't crying at all. She was running the vacuum in the living room and her heavy voice rang loudly from the cellar stairs. She was singing.

"Shoo—shoo, baby," her voice, if one could call it that, was giving out. "ShooooShoooo BaaaBeeee."

Joey got down to business.

"You ain't hiding down here," he said. "I'll call Ma and tell her where you are."

That strange, animal sensation was creeping down Herbert Prentiss' spine again. His hands tingled. He felt as though he wanted to swing a palm with all his strength straight at Joey's pink ears.

"Joey," he said, but with no amount of effort could he inject any anger into

his voice. "I thought I told you to carry out the ashes."

For an instant he thought Joey was going to bit him.

Joey's chest swelled proudly.

"I'm working on a B27," he said, as though that answered everything.

Herbert looked puzzled.

"But the ashes?"

Joey grinned.

"I'm in the war effort," he said. "You better go to work on them ashes, Pop. I might call Ma anytime, and where'd you be then?"

HERBERT PRENTISS almost did what his son suggested. He did go so far as to pick up one bucket, breathed the choking gray ashes up his nostrils, stumbled under the weight of the load and dropped it again.

Joey, already busy on his model airplane, turned with a smirking grin and chuckled.

Herbert Prentiss stood very still for almost a minute. Upstairs, Jaunice was well into the fifth round of Shoo-Shoo-Baby. Her voice carried genuine pathos. Pete's hammer accompanied her from the garage. Herbert Prentiss dusted his coat carefully and a gleam came into his eyes. It was a very small gleam, but a gleam nevertheless. He turned and walked slowly up the steps to the frozen world beyond the cellar doors.

His footsteps lagged as he went toward the garage. No, probably Jaunice would want the car this afternoon. He would walk.

He moved slowly toward the street. As he reached the sidewalk, his footsteps quickened. Once out of sight of the house, he broke into a nervous trot. Two blocks away, he was running. His cheeks were flushed and the animal gleam in his eyes had grown more pronounced.

DOCTOR HOWARD BROWNE (the last name, he told his patients must be spelled with an "e") looked up from behind his heavy, rimless glasses and smiled as Herbert Prentiss was ushered in by a nurse in spotless white.

Doctor Browne (spelled with an "e") arose and leaned across the desk. "Why, hello Herbert."

Herbert Prentiss accepted the hand timidly and winced as the Doctor squeezed.

"Good afternoon," he said and stared around him at the alarming array of enameled tables and cabinets. He sat down on the edge of a leather chair and continued to look at the doctor. His lips twitched but he couldn't force himself to confide in the white coated man behind the desk. He and Howard Browne had been friends for years, but that was at the Moose Hall. Cloaked in the white of his profession, Browne presented a new and alarming problem.

"What seems to be the matter, Herbert?"

Herbert Prentiss fidgeted.

"I—I don't feel so good," he said.

The doctor looked concerned.

"But you're in sound health," he insisted. "Only last month I looked you over for that insurance policy. The company thinks you're a good risk."

Herbert shivered. A good risk indeed. That was about what his family thought of him. A fine risk for insurance. A man who would live and work and bring home a pay check for a good many years yet.

"I'm—I'm frustrated," he said suddenly. He blurted it out, as though it was a horrible disease.

For a full minute the Doctor said nothing. Little crows feet gathered in the corners of his eyes and his forehead wrinkled. He found something on the floor behind the desk that demanded his immediate attention. When his head

came into sight again, he had regained his composure and his face had smoothed out to professional calmness.

"Herbert," he said, "would you mind repeating what you just said?"

Herbert shrugged.

"Maybe that isn't the correct word," he said. "I'm frustrated—you know—henpecked—shoved around."

Doctor Browne frowned thoughtfully. He fiddled with a small, pen-shaped tube that was clipped inside his coat pocket. He pulled it out and placed it on the desk.

"I see," he said it in a long breath, as though it was a very learned admission. Then he continued to stare at Herbert.

"Tell me about it," he said at last. "All about it."

HERBERT PRENTISS blushed. He sank back into his chair like a small boy who is going to talk to the Principal.

"My wife picks on me," he said, then added hurriedly, "and her brother and even Joey. Joey's my son."

Doctor Browne nodded.

"I guess I love them," Herbert said. "That is, all but Pete. No one could love Pete."

The Doctor shook his head. No—no one could love Pete.

"If—if I could just get the courage," Herbert said miserably, "I would tell Pete to go to hell."

He stopped, smiled wistfully and added:

"I guess I'd rather tell Pete to go to hell than anything else in the world."

"Why don't you," Doctor Browne suggested.

Herbert Prentiss turned very pale.

"Oh no, I couldn't do that. I'm afraid to. I'm—I'm a mouse."

Doctor Browne had treated cases like this before. Being a family doctor had brought a lot of strange cases his

way. Cases that dealt with scientific healing of the mind, as well as of the body. Healing that worked miracles.

"It has been my experience, Herbert," he said, "that once a man says what's on his mind he feels better."

No, he admitted to himself that wasn't the right approach. Herbert Prentiss had to act like a man. To do that, he had to *feel* like a man. Herbert had to have something, a prop, to keep him from falling over. Doctor Browne's eyes noted the silver tube that he had absently dropped on the desk top. His eyes lighted up. He picked up the tube and held it gently between his firm fingers. He stared straight into Herbert Prentiss' eyes.

"I can cure you," he said, "completely."

Herbert Prentiss sprang from his chair. He leaned across the desk, both hands against the glass top, his eager face lighted for the first time with a grateful smile.

"You don't know what—what this means to me."

Doctor Browne nodded.

"I think I do," he said. "I'm going to introduce to you the powerful forces of the hypnotic tube."

"Hypnotic tube?"

Herbert's eyes lighted on the slim metal shaft between Browne's fingers. He reached for it and a look of awe flooded his pinched face.

"You mean?"

The Doctor nodded.

"That tube has the power to rule anyone," he said. "But—you have to know how to use it."

Herbert Prentiss sat down patiently to learn the complicated job in using the hypnotic tube.

stopped to examine the place where he had landed on his back just two hours ago. He listened for the sounds that would tell him where the various members of the household had located themselves.

Pete was still in the garage. He had worn out the *Volga Boatman* and was murdering *Sweet Adeline*. Jaunice, evidently making herself beautiful in her room, was hard at work on *Nobody's Sweetheart Now*.

Herbert Prentiss approached the door and pushed it open. He went in and wiped his feet on the hall rug. At once he sensed a change upstairs. Jaunice's song halted abruptly. He didn't. He went quickly up the stairs, pausing only long enough to toss his snowy overcoat in the center of the front room. He turned at the top of the stairs, took a long run and slid through the bedroom door leaving heel marks on the polished hardwood floor.

Jaunice Prentiss was on her feet. Her double chin face was almost purple as she stood there with a thin robe between her and fresh air. She looked to Herbert as though he was something out of a horror story by Poe. Herbert's hand foud his pocket and felt for the comforting, cool shaft of the hypnotic tube.

"Hello," he said, and for the first time in years, his voice conveyed the light airy touch of a man completely satisfied with himself.

Jaunice continued to stare as though she couldn't believe her eyes. Two super sensitive ears had told her that her hall rug was smooched with dirty snow, her carpet was wet with his coat and the hall was black with shoe marks.

"You worm," she said, as she usually did.

"Now Jaunice," Mr. Prentiss said, and didn't back away from her.

"You," she started again, and

MR. PRENTISS usually entered his home via the rear door. Today he walked boldly up the front steps and

thought better of it. "How many times have I told you. . . ?"

"Shut up," Herbert said calmly.

Jaunice Prentiss took one step forward and the floor shook under the impact.

"What did you say?"

"Shut up," Herbert repeated and whipped the hypnotic tube from his pocket. He aimed it straight at her.

"Herbert—have you gone crazy?"

IT WORKED. The tube worked. A new strength coursed through him. He held on to the tube grimly.

"You have been pushing me around for a long time," he said. "Now it's my turn. A man's home is his castle."

He stopped and smiled triumphantly. He had heard that a long time ago at lodge meeting and had smiled a little grimly at the time. Now he meant every word of it.

The tube was still at work. Jaunice faltered and the expression on her face changed. She backed away from him.

"Herbert," she asked wonderingly. "Are you insane?"

"You're repeating yourself," he said, and put a nasty edge on his voice. "No, I haven't gone crazy. I'm just about ready to become the boss around here myself. After this, you're taking orders from me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes," she admitted quietly. "I guess. . . ."

"If you're good," he went on, "you can go to the matinee on Saturday like you have been letting me do. After this, you keep quiet and let me do the talking."

Jaunice sat down limply on the bed. A soft light came into her eyes. The color drained from her face and she looked almost attractive.

"Oh, Herbert," she said. "*You're a man again.*"

Herbert Prentiss forgot his anger. He forgot the hypnotic tube and it fell to the floor and rolled across the carpet.

"Gee," he said. "I guess you're pretty nice after all."

"JOEY!"

Joey Prentiss continued work on the model plane without looking up or acknowledging the call from the stairs.

"JOEY!"

Joey made an impatient motion with his shoulders and stood up.

"What you want?"

He wasn't inclined to answer his father, but suppose the old man had something good on the ball. Maybe he'd better find out.

"Come up here."

"Nuts," Joey said, and sat down again. He listened, though, wondering at the firmness of his father's footsteps as Herbert came down the stairs. He pretended to work as his father approached him from the rear.

Crack.

"Ouch!" Joey whirled around, his hand grasped one ear. His eyes opened wide.

"Hey," he shouted. "What's the idea of hitting me?"

Herbert Prentiss was panting. His cheeks were pale. He faced Joey with feet well apart, a shining tube in his hand. He pointed the tube straight at Joey.

"I've taken enough of this business from you, young man," Herbert said with dignity.

Joey continued to feel his ear with his fingertips, wondering how the old man had ever dared to do it.

"I'll tell Ma on you," he said. "She'll pound the hell out of you."

CRACK.

Herbert's palm connected with Joey's other ear.

"That's enough," he said sternly.

"Now get to work on those ashes."

Joey wanted to call Ma, but something told him he'd better not. Pop meant it. He meant it because he had a wild, satisfied gleam in his eyes. Joey looked around carefully, calculated the ash job would take at least an hour, and groaned.

"I gotta go to the show this afternoon," he said.

"You gotta do nothing of the kind," Herbert said. "You can carry out the ashes. After that, clean the furnace out and wash the floor. When you get done, eat your supper and go to bed."

Herbert turned away. He didn't wait to see Joey go to work. He had another important job in the garage.

WHEN he opened the garage door, Joey was already struggling with the first basket, trying to slide it up the outside stairs. Herbert had no fear of Jaunice interfering with Joey's work. Jaunice had a new understanding with Herbert. She was resting now, and wondering what would happen next.

Pete turned and scowled again as Herbert Prentiss came in. Pete tossed a half scuttle of coal into the stove and slammed the door with a bang.

"You back again?"

He said it as though he was greeting a worm that had just crawled from under a rock.

Herbert didn't answer. He walked across the garage and turned off the electric light over the bench.

Pete looked up, put down his hammer and squinted at Herbert.

"I'm working here," he said.

It didn't seem to make any difference.

Herbert crossed to the stove, closed the damper and tossed a bucket of ashes on top of the coals. He closed the stove. The heat started to die very rapidly.

"Hey," Pete said. "I said I'm working here."

Herbert turned and pointed the tube at Pete.

"Not any more, you're not," he said mildly. "You're packing your bags. You're getting out of my house before night."

Pete drew himself up to his full six feet.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" he asked in an amused voice. "You little pip-squeak. My sister will take care of you. I'm staying with her, not you. I guess I work for my keep."

"I guess you don't," Herbert said. "Now get out."

PETE thought it over carefully. His smile was gone. Some of his courage had failed him.

"Look here, Herby, if I've done anything to . . . ?"

"You haven't," Herbert said calmly. "You haven't done a thing, not since you came here and started eating my food ten years ago. *Now get out.*"

Pete turned and started slowly for the door. Herbert Prentiss stared down at the hypnotic tube which he still held firmly gripped in his hand. He wondered if its power would hold out. *Would he dare? Yes. By the Gods, he would.*

He planted a carefully aimed kick in the direction of Pete's pants. His tall brother-in-law yelped loudly, reached the door and turned. All his calmness had vanished. He was thoroughly cowed.

"You'll be sorry," he said, "kicking out your best pal like this."

For the first time he seemed to notice the tube in Mr. Prentiss' hands. A puzzled frown crossed his face.

"What you keep pointing that flashlight at me for?"

Mr. Prentiss felt a red hot flash ziz-

zling up his spine.

Pete saw Herhert Prentiss' face darken and moved outside hurriedly.

"I'm going," he said. "I'm going right now. Don't hit me."

He turned and started to run toward the house.

Herhert Prentiss continued to stand in the garage door. Across the lawn Joey was working swiftly to cut down the pile of ashes in the haseament. Upstairs, Jaunice slept the sleep of the conquered and Pete was already packing his bags in the little hack bedroom. Mr. Prentiss could see him through the window.

Herbert Prentiss smiled down at the powerful hypnotic tube. Pete had called the tube a flashlight. Curiously Herbert Prentiss examined it more closely. He screwed off the end and

a small battery fell out into his hand. His hand started to shake. He unscrewed the other end. A reflector and a bulb slipped into his fingers. The shaking that started with his hand worked gradually up his arm and affected his entire body.

Pete was right. It was a flashlight.

All the marvelous strength he had found was in his own mind. Everything he had done he could have done years ago if he had been able to tap that great storehouse of courage hidden inside him.

Mr. Prentiss stood there, thinking of what he had been able to do with the help of an ordinary flashlight.

"Amazing," he whispered softly. "It really is. . ."

Herbert Prentiss fainted.

THE END

The OBSERVATORY by the Editor

(Continued from page 3)

notably "Report From The Forgotten Past," and a great portion of "Discussions" containing letters of importance in the matter; but instead we have presented a series of articles which have come in from readers because of the Shaver Mystery.

WE WANT to point, especially, to an article by Roger Philip Graham entitled "The Shaver Mystery." This article will demonstrate to you the amount of "reader participation" in this uncanny matter, and will express your editor's viewpoint quite well. We want to mention that any of you more serious readers who have been convinced of the great truths behind Mr. Shaver's fiction follow the advice given by Mr. Graham and invest \$5.00 in a copy of *Oahupe*. This isn't a bit of free advertising—we are always ready to advocate the purchase of a bible, and *Oahupe* is just that. It is the newest of the world's inspired writings, and in it the deep student will find the counterpart to Mr. Shaver's dero and tere, and to all the weird things that are happening today in the world.

REGARDING those weird things, H. G. Wells' latest book (according to the newspaper accounts we read) contains a shocked reference to

something strange that is happening in the world, and of which many people are weirdly aware. He predicts the end for Man, and ends on a note of utter despair. This, from Mr. Wells, whose "Outline of History" thrilled the world, is almost unbelievable. But more direct and to the point (Mr. Wells doesn't know exactly what it is he fears) is the testimony of William Boebe, prominent scientist, speaking out bluntly in *Atlantic Monthly*, concerning the coming invasion of the surface world by the underground race! Apparently this issue struck a responsive chord in many people, for it is fantastically hard to procure a copy, and your editor has not yet succeeded. But we do know that he said it, and we ask you WHAT ABOUT THAT?

WHEN Mr. Wells says many people are aware of weird things going on, he has your editor right behind him with the proof! We have, in our private files, thousands of letters from people all over the world, telling us of these weird things. It is TRUE, Mr. Wells—but it is not FATAL, as you hint. Mankind is not finished on this planet, to be replaced by what you hint is a new species, or even a mutation of a present species. Man is entering a new phase in his cosmic history. Earth, as a planet, has matured, is of voting age in the great cosmogony of planets and worlds inhabited by Man. A great change IS to take place, and it may be the bloodiest, or it may be the most peaceful change of Earth's history. That depends on a number of those weird things you mention, and particularly on what you mention, Mr. Boebe, the underground race? Mr. Shaver has been telling us

In every story of the danger. Thousands of our readers have been telling us. What are we going to do about it? Man has become of age, but he faces a great danger, because he has an enemy, a creature who is human, but who is far from being a Man.

ON PAGE 166 we have begun a new series of articles, or rather, a new department called "What Man Can Imagine . . ." In it our readers will deliberately present new theories, new science, new ideas that are not yet accepted by the world as fact. In it readers will take issue with some things which are accepted as fact. The new department is planned to provide a place for man's imagination to express itself untrammelled by what is today called "authority." As an aside, you'd be shocked to know that there are, today, powerful organizations devoted to the suppression of knowledge and of truth; that there are bigoted and dogmatic societies whose sole operation is the persecution of freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of action. We may run up against some of these organizations—but we point out that in our magazine, imagination holds full sway, and what Man can imagine, he can do. Perhaps, even though a theory presented in this department is wholly erroneous, a scientist or just a common man with a mind may find a signpost pointing toward truth and the betterment of mankind.

"IMMORTALITY Needs Your Help" is the first contribution to your new department. It is the work of Hobart M. Gibson. He has presented some facts, and some theory. Can anything be done with either, or both? If anything can, Man will benefit.

ANOTHER thought-provoking article is "Radio's Strangest Mystery" by Vincent H. Gaddis. Is it true that we have already contacted Mars by radio? Read the facts that Mr. Gaddis has assembled and then ask yourself that question. And if so, what does it mean? And can you see the connection with the Shaver Mystery?

MR. GADDIS has also presented us with some facts about caves and underground people in his "Tales From Tibet." These "tales" are as accurate as can be secured, and we stand prepared to back Mr. Gaddis up on this article. The burden of disproof lies with those who dispute the statements.

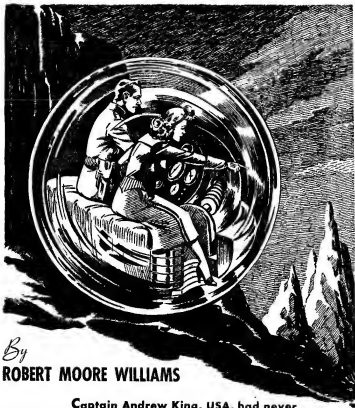
"LIFE Is Simple," another bit by Mr. Gibson, presents some rather startling information. We present it with a straight face, and seriously ask you to consider it. We ask you to think. We have asked you to think for many years now, and many of you have—the results are evident in the world today. Even the atom bomb was the result of a "crackpot" theory. Was it not Einstein who went to Roosevelt with a lot of "crazy calcu-

lations" and said "why not build the atom bomb for THIS war?" Much as we disagree with some of Einstein's theories regarding the nature of the universe, we point out that it was his imagination, expressed where other imaginations could grasp it, that helped toward a reality.

HOW was everything Man created in the world made? What goes into making something concrete? Well, first Man must imagine it. He must visualize it in his conscious mind, with the help of that faculty known as imagination. When he has done so, he has supplied the first concrete part of that object. The "thought" of an object is a real part of it, and without that thought it cannot exist. What if Edison had imagined the electric light globe as a "sponge" which glowed? What we would use today for all our lighting would not be a glass bulb with the air partially exhausted and containing a filament which is made incandescent by an electric flow, but a spongy substance that would glow. Once a thing is "created" in thought, it is already begun, and must, by some process we have only begun to understand, be "materialized."

FOR those of you who sneer—ah, but this is metaphysics—there is no metaphysics. Everything in the universe is real substance. Even God. God is the universe, and it is real, and it is substance. There is nothing but substance, and space for it to exist in. When science goes off on its THEORIES of wave mechanics and the breaking down of matter till nothing is left but "energy" they are pipe-dreaming. Imagine tearing up a piece of paper until a point is reached where there are no "bits" of paper, but only energy. Just what is energy? Energy, we say, is only the relationship of particles of matter to other particles, the relationship being motion and the result of motion, ultimate collision. What was released when the atom bomb blew up? Energy from atoms? The mysterious "cement" that binds them together? No! Their rate of motion and their direction of motion was changed. This incredible motion was the explosion we created at Hiroshima. And when the particles of Uranium had stopped their unaturally speedy motion, they had taken up new orbits of motion and become two different elements, composed of particles of matter moving in planned and orderly orbits. No matter was destroyed, no matter was changed into energy; it just moved for an instant in a different way, an unplanned way, but as instantly returned to a planned and stable motion, with exactly the same amount of matter present as before!

HOW do we know? Perhaps on no better basis than science "knows" that matter is converted to energy, and with NO LESS proof. You takes it or you leaves it—and you have your editor's insistence that you do either, as YOU think.—Rop



By

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

**Captain Andrew King, USA, had never
faced a menace such as confronted him in**

Akkan—where a lovely huntress stalked her prey

AS THE shrill yell split the hot night, Sandy King—late Captain Andrew King of the United States Army Intelligence Section in the Asiatic Theater of Operations—slid a swift hand under the rolled-up coat that was serving as a pillow and grabbed the handle of the automatic hidden there. The echoes of the yell—whether it came from beast,

The HUNTRESS OF AKKAIN



It was an amazing phantom city in a desolate setting . . .

crazy man, or impossible creature of the night—had not stopped echoing through the half-wrecked Dak hungalow before he was fully awake. Men who had done the things he had done in the places he had done them either learned to awaken at the slightest sound or the time soon came when they did not awaken at all. King awakened instantly. The punkah fan on the ceiling had not stopped its last downward movement as the frightened coolie let go the pull rope before he was fully alert. He listened.

The even breathing of Cal Carson, late master sergeant attached to the intelligence section, faltered slightly, then continued as regularly as before. King knew that Carson was awake and ready, his gun half drawn, but that the sergeant had no intention of letting a change in the tempo of his breathing reveal to a possible listener that he was awake. As good as they ever came, Carson.

At the other end of the room Sin Yul grunted and sat up, muttering a mixture of Burmese and Chinese curses under his breath, then abruptly was silent. King mentally cursed the guide, but after the initial movement, Sin Yul made no sound. Outside the half wrecked Dak rest-house there was silence.

Too much silence. The shrill of a night bird, the raucous mutter of one of the giant toads, the chipper-chip of a flying fox—they were really hats, big ones—would have been better than this stillness. Normally the jungle was never still, except, of course, when the tiger walked in the night.

It was no tiger that had screamed. Like their smaller brothers, the big cats preferred to keep quiet. Something else had howled—

"Yooooow!"

The sound came again, ripping a hole

in the stillness, lifting the hair along the back of King's neck. Abruptly Sin Yul was shaking him.

"Welly wake up, Sahih. Bad no good monkey business heap go on outside. Sumpin' hollerin' there, hy god. Sahih King, sair——"

"Shut up!"

Hissing with indrawn breath, Sin Yul relapsed into flustered silence. King rose, slipped on his hoots, slid to the jagged hole that served as a window. As he moved he was aware that Carson had already slipped on his boots and was coming with him. They looked out.

In front of the hungalow was a little clearing. Their hearer coolies had built a tiny blaze in the open space and had been huddled around it. At the first yell the coolies had silently decamped. Beyond the clearing the bamboo began, the thick, heavy hamboo of the rain forests of Upper Burma. Mile upon mile of the green plants stretched down the side of the mountain.

Light from a three-quarter waxing moon poured into the clearing, revealing nothing.

"It's in the bamboo," Carson whispered.

"Yeah."

"What the devil do you think it is, Sandy?"

"An owl, maybe?"

"Yeah? Sandy, I've heard an owl or two in my time, and I never heard no owl make a sound like that."

"Neither have I," said King dryly.

They waited. Silence held the bamboo forest. Behind them, Sin Yul's heavy breathing was audible.

"I can slip out the back and make a circle in that bamboo and flush him out and you can pot him when he shows," Carson suggested.

"You stay here," King abruptly ordered. "A fat chance you'd have out

there in that bamboo."

"I flushed me some of our little yellow brothers out of some bamboo once, and you potted 'em as they came out," Carson pointed out.

"I know. But that isn't a Jap out there now. *Sh! There it is!*"

A **G**AINST the dark blotch of the bamboo a shadow had moved. It was just a shadow, a movement in darkness, barely discernible. Every sense alert, King watched. Something was standing there at the edge of the clearing, watching the bungalow. Was it—the fleeting thought flashed through King's mind—was it watching them? Did it know they were in the resthouse? Had it come here seeking them?

He shrugged the thought aside. Whatever crouched out there in the darkness, it could not have come looking for them. For if it was after them, then their reason for being here was known.

That was impossible. No one but he and Carson knew why they were here, what monstrous secret they sought here in these tortuous mountains of Upper Burma. He and Carson and Mackintosh, if he was still alive, did not, could not know they were here. No, the thing out there in the darkness was not seeking them. Its presence out there was due to accident, nothing else. He hoped.

It came out of the darkness. It darted toward the bungalow, stopped halfway, stood looking fearfully, hesitantly toward the ruined rest-house.

"It's a man!" Carson whispered.

It was a man, but it had run half bent over like an animal. Now it stood erect, leaning forward, looking toward the bungalow. A man. A thin, gaunt skeleton of man, naked except for a ragged strip of cloth around his middle. Bearded, with long, tangled hair. A

scarecrow and a skeleton.

"If ever I saw the walking picture of starvation—Hey, it's coming in."

A twig had snapped in the thick bamboo. At the sound, the man had turned his head with the quick motion of a startled animal. For a split second he had listened, his head cocked at an angle. Then he turned and darted toward the bungalow.

"Mackintosh!" King suddenly yelled. "In here, man, in here. We'll cover you."

In spite of the absence of clothing, in spite of the gaunt frame, he had recognized this scarecrow. Mackintosh! The man they had come here seeking. Their friend, their more than friend, their buddy. Their sharer of a thousand dangers, Mackintosh, late—although he probably didn't know that the war with Japan had ended—and his connection with the service had terminated—late of the United States Army Intelligence Corps. The quick way he had turned his head, the cock of his chin as he listened, by these two characteristics alone King would have recognized Mackintosh among thousands.

This was Mackintosh!

He stopped instantly, stared toward the bungalow.

"Sandy! Is it you I'm hearin' or am I still in Heaven?"

"Mack, it's me all right. Mack, *look out!*"

OUT of the dark bamboo forest four figures had hurtled. Like dogs on the scent of prey, they leaped straight toward Mackintosh! The pistol in King's hand jutted fire. He shot without taking aim but at the explosive blast of the pistol, the foremost shadow leaping from the forest collapsed in a huddle and sprawled forward, the knife blade in his hand glinting in the moonlight. The second figure stumbled over the

fallen man and King's bullet went over his head. The other two darted back into the bamboo.

"Sandy! Man, am I glad to see you!" Mackintosh's hand was lean and bony and wet. "And Cal. This is like old home week, isn't it? Mind if I sit down?"

King could feel Mackintosh sagging. "Whiskey!" he said to Sin Yul, and the Chinese — Mongol — or whatever he was, scurried among their supplies as he obeyed. Mackintosh sat down on the floor, half in, half out of the moonlight pouring through the broken window where Carson had already resumed his guard position.

"We got your message," King said.

"Ah. I wondered if it would be delivered—ah—in time."

"In time?"

"In time to do me any good. I didn't doubt that you would come hot-footing it up here as soon as you could get leave but I did doubt if the old man would let you come—"

"Paying attention to generals went out of fashion when the war ended," King grunted.

"Man, you mean the war's over?" Mackintosh shouted. "You mean the lads have hung Tojo on a sour cherry tree and marched down the streets of Tokyo?"

"That they have," King answered. "The Jap fleet is at the bottom of the sea and the Jap warlords are in hell where they belong."

"Well, now that is what I call good news," Mackintosh said, satisfaction in his voice. "Yes, indeed. The little yellow b——s got what was coming to them. That listens mighty fine. Many a time we looked forward to the day when the war would end and we would go marching home, eh Sandy? To think it's finally come!"

King let him talk. A man who had

fought through the war had a right to let off a little steam when he first learned that the fighting was over. Mackintosh seemed a little dazed at the news. King gently steered him to another subject.

"That yell? Eh, Sandy, I forgot you didn't know about it. The lads out there—" he waved his hand toward the window where Carson crouched on guard—"the lads out there were doing the yelling. Havin' fun, they were."

"Fun?"

"Yeah. They thought it was fun," Mackintosh drawled. "Thanks, Gunga Din, I'll have another drop of that whiskey, if you don't mind." The liquor slopped from the aluminum cup as he lifted it to his lips. He seemed to find strength in the drink. "Playin' a game, they were. Yeah. A game."

"Um. Who are they?"

"WHO are they? Well, now that's a question. The army classification section would classify them as assassins, skilled, which would be understating their ability in the fine art of murder. We thought the commando schools taught us something about killing, but, Sandy, we're just amateurs compared to those lads . . ."

"Who are they?" King grunted.

"Yes, yes. I was wanderin' from the subject, wasn't I? They work for Akbad. And Akbad—" The voice trailed into silence.

"Go on," King gently prodded. "Who is Akbad? You never mentioned him in your message."

"I'm trying to think of some way to tell you who Akbad is," Mackintosh thoughtfully continued. "Akbad is a man. He's a Chinese or a Hindu or a Mongol or a Burmese, or a cross between any of these and any other Asiatic race you can mention. But he's a

man all right. I'm pretty sure about that. Or at least I *think* he's a man—"

King felt a little sliver of cold run up his spine as if a spider with tiny, ice-cold feet had run up his back. Had Mack blown his top? Had danger and exhaustion and fatigue taken their deadly toll?

"What the hell, Mack?"

As if he had not heard him, Mackintosh continued. "Akbad is the high priest of a certain temple located near here, the *Temple of the Forbidden Delight*, I believe they call it, in their squishy language. It's an old temple, older than the hills, older than Burma, older than China, maybe older than the human race, for all I know. There were times when I wondered how old it was— Ah. Wandering again. Akbad is the big shot of this temple. Sandy, there were times when I thought he was a man, and times when I didn't know what he was. When I didn't know what he was, Sandy, those were the times when I thought he was a god."

"What?"

"Still think it!" Mackintosh stubbornly insisted. "No, don't look toward that medicine kit. I don't need any atabrine or quinine. But if you want to think I'm out of my head, I'm willing to agree with you, because Sandy, either my eyes are liars, or I have seen the impossible happen."

KING pulled a package of cigarettes out of his pocket, started to light one, remembered where he was, and thrust both cigarette and match back where he had got them.

"As what?" he said cautiously.

"Um? Oh. Well, I've seen men vanish."

"I've seen elephants vanish, on the stage."

"This wasn't on the stage."

King was silent.

"Matter of fact, I've vanished myself," Mackintosh continued.

"Yes."

"Matter of fact, I've been to heaven."

"Uh!"

"I've seen the pearly gates, Sandy, glittering in the sky. Oh, I didn't get up close enough to touch 'em, but I saw 'em. And I saw angels flying through the air and I heard the harper's chorus playing before the throne—"

"Skip it!"

"Huh?"

"Start over, at the beginning, and come again, Mack. And this time, lad, don't tell me your hashish dreams or I'll clip you on the conk."

"Well, maybe they were dreams, but I don't think—"

"Start at the beginning!"

"All right. All right. You sound like a blasted colonel!" For a moment irritation showed in his voice. Then Mackintosh continued. "As you know, I came up here looking for a secret radio station that our little yellow brothers had hidden somewhere back in these hills. Didn't find the damned thing—"

"The air force found it," King interrupted. "After that, it wasn't there any more."

"So that was why it went off the air! Stout fellas, those air force lads. Well, when I couldn't pick it up any more and hence couldn't get a directional fix on it with the little receiver I had, I thought the Jappos had got wise and moved it. So, I started back. Trouble was, I took a short cut."

"Yes?"

"Bad mistake, that short cut. Got off the beaten track. Got lost as hell. Wandered into Akbad's territory by mistake. Matter of fact, I wandered right straight into his temple. And

that, Sandy, was wrong."

"So I gather. These natives are likely to be touchy as hell about their temples. What happened?"

"I was fed the fatted calf. Wine, the very best, better food than I had seen in two years. A private harem for my very own. Little beauties all lined up in front of me and I was given my choice of all or any. I was bathed, rubbed with ointments, perfumed, given the softest robes you can imagine. Anything you can think of, I had it for the asking. They really had the welcome sign out on the doormat."

"Sounds like quite a place!"

"It was. It is!"

"What was wrong with it?"

"That is what I don't know."

"But—"

"If I knew what happened to me, really knew what actually took place, then maybe I could tell you what was wrong."

"What do you think happened to you? Mack, darn your hide, get specific. What were they doing? Fattening you up to sacrifice you?"

"Sacrifice me?" Mackintosh shrugged. "Oh, no; nothing like that. They were fattening me up so I would be in the proper shape to go—ah—to heaven!"

"Mack!"

"They were going to send me there. Fact is, they did send me there. Fact is—"

AT THE window, Carson grunted.

A gun thundered. King turned. Flickering past his eyes, darting in through the broken window, was a billiard ball that glowed with a milky whiteness. Carson fired one shot at it, missed. For a split second, it hung in the air. In that second there ripped from Mackintosh's throat such a scream as King had never heard come

from a human being. It was the scream of a man who has been tortured, goaded long past the breaking point, and who, knowing that the last terrible moment is upon him, spends the last remnants of his strength in one soul-wrenching yell.

Mackintosh leaped to his feet, dived toward the window on the opposite side of the room. The ball hesitated for a second, then darted after him, leaped at him, chased him, overtook him, seemed to touch him, to rest for a moment on his skin. Then it passed from sight.

For an instant, King could not see it. In that split second, Mackintosh screamed again, a sound that died swiftly into a gurgle. As the scream died, Mackintosh began to fall. As he fell, the billiard ball reappeared. It was on the other side of him. It leaped up into the air almost to the ceiling, hung there. For a moment it was filmed with a reddish mist. Then the redness faded and its surface was again milky white.

Mackintosh was falling. He still retained the momentum gained in the mad dash for the farther window. It kept him moving. But his legs would no longer support him and as he moved, he fell. He hit the wall with a crunch, sagged to the floor and did not move.

The billiard ball darted down, hovered over him, then rose into the air and flitted out the window.

King pulled a flashlight out of his pocket, moved forward, bent down, shielded the rays, turned the beam on Mackintosh. He turned off the light, straightened up. Sin Yul's frightened eyes were on him. From the window Carson watched him. He wiped sudden drops of sweat from his face.

Mackintosh was dead. A hole had been burned completely through his body. The hole was exactly as big

and exactly as round as a billiard ball.

II

KING stood in the middle of the floor, not moving, not thinking, not letting himself think. He could hear Sin Yul breathing heavily, like a horse with asthma. At the window, Carson had not moved.

Mack was dead. That was not possible. *Mack was dead.* A billiard ball that flew through the air had burned a hole through him and then had floated out the window. Somewhere near here was a temple ruled by a man named Akbad, except that maybe Akbad wasn't a man. Then what the hell was he? Skin crawled all over King's body.

"Yowie!"

The screech echoed through the night outside, rolled across the bamboo forest, lifting King's hair, speeding up the pounding of his already racing heart.

"They're comin', Sandy," Carson whispered.

King stepped to the window. Dark figures were moving out of the bamboo. Carson's gun covered them but Carson did not shoot. They made no effort at concealment. King saw why.

The billiard ball was dancing in the air before them. Like a playful firefly, it was darting, dancing, twisting ahead of them, leading them straight toward the wrecked bungalow.

"I can mow 'em down," Carson whispered.

"But can you mow *it* down?" King answered.

Could either of them hit the dancing ball? And if they did hit it, would a slug from a pistol harm it?

"Sandy, we got to do one or the other damned quick," Carson said.

"I know, Cal. Fight or give up?"

"Wait here," King said.

He stepped outside. The ball leaped

up to tree-top level, danced there a second as if surprised, began to move in quick, eccentric circles, darted forward, drew back, was never still for a moment. The men had stopped. Out of the corners of their eyes they watched the ball as if they were waiting for orders from it. There were four of them, bearded, with close-cropped hair, except for sandals and loin cloths, naked. In the moonlight King could see them clearly. Their faces were the faces of Caucasians, thin noses, high foreheads, but their skin was Negro black. Each carried a hooked knife in his hand, had another like it stuck into his belt.

"Well?" said King.

The four men did not move. The ball danced above them. The night was silent. King could hear his heart pounding, could feel the throb of his pulse at his temple. The silence held. Sweat ran down over King's eyelids and into his eyes. He dared not brush it away.

"Well?" he repeated.

"Bravo!" a voice answered from far away. "A stout fella. A stout fella, indeed!" There was a soft sound like the clapping of hands and it too was far away.

"Who spoke?" King whispered.

Laughter answered him.

"Who spoke?" he rasped.

"I spoke," the faraway voice answered. "I, Akbad—"

"You—"

"You seem to recognize my name!"

"Where are you?"

"Where does the brave one think I am?"

"I don't know. Where are you?"

Laughter sounded far away. "You seem disturbed, my brave one." The words were slurred, almost a hiss. "You shall soon know where I am. You shall soon know. Ha! Or do you want to try to use that gun you are clutching

so nervously? Do you wish to signal your brave companions hiding inside the building to shoot too? Perhaps you would prefer to do that, no?"

"I could do that!" King said.

AS HE spoke, he was aware that the glittering hall, darting in circles above him, seemed suddenly to poise itself as if it was getting ready to dart toward him. A lion, in that split second before the charge, acted like that. He remembered Mackintosh and how the hall had overtaken him when he tried to run, how it had slid through him like a red-hot ball hearing diving into a tub of butter.

"Do you wish to shoot?" the far-off voice anxiously inquired. There was eagerness in that voice. King heard the eagerness. And realized that Akhad wanted him to shoot, wanted him to resist. Mackintosh had said the lads had been playing a game, had been having fun. No doubt Akhad, wherever he was, had been participating in that game. Hearing the eagerness in the far-off voice, King realized how hellish that game was.

"You win, Akhad," King said. "There will be no shooting, tonight." He tossed his pistol on the ground in front of him. "See! I offer no resistance. Carson! Sin Yul! Lay down your guns and come out here. There will be no shooting tonight, Akhad."

"Some other night, perhaps?" the far-off voice regretfully said. "Ah, well, if that is what you wish, then that is the way it must be. The wishes of my guests are sacred and you are now my guest. My servants will show you what to do. Eknar el h'singto!"

The last words were in a foreign tongue. The four men leaped to obey. By signs they directed that the three men were to follow them. They led them up a trail into the hammoo forest

along the edge of the mountain.

"What makes, Sandy?" Carson inquired.

"Lord, Cal, I wish I knew!" King fervently answered. "The same thing that caught Mack has caught us." He glanced up. Flitting along above the trail, following them just above the level of the tree tops, was the softly glowing billiard hall.

"Maybe we should have fought it out back there," King muttered.

"We were dead men if we did," Cal Carson answered.

"Wish make suggest we are all-same dead men anyhow!" Sin Yul blurted out, breaking his silence for the first time.

THE temple of Akhad lay well up in the hills, in the rocky cliff of a mountain peak that a squad of men could defend against an army. They climbed all night to reach it, two of the natives ahead leading the way, two bringing up the rear as guards. The hall floated overhead, following them like some tiny but extremely vicious watchdog. Dawn was lighting the mountain peaks when they reached the temple. It squatted in the monstrous cliffs like some hideous toad, fat-hellied and warty, poisonous. And it was old, as old as mountains around it. The huge granite blocks that made up its outer walls were weathered smooth. Not in a year nor in a thousand years would tough granite weather to such crumhling smoothness. The individual building blocks were huge, weighing tons. King had seen the granite blocks that went into the Egyptian pyramids, the single gigantic chunk of stone that lies in the quarry outside ruined Baalbek, stones so big that modern engineers do not even now understand how they were moved. The blocks in this temple were larger. It looked older

than the pyramids, older than Baalbek, older than Nineveh, older than the Biblical cities of the plains of ancient Abraham.

An old, old temple shaped like a toad hugging a mountain cleft in Upper Burma. The two natives running ahead of them, the ball following above, they trudged toward the gate, were taken inside, into a room as richly and as grotesquely furnished as any King had ever seen. No storied sultan of India, no Maharajah, had softer rugs than these on his palace floors, had tapestries worked with so much gold thread, encrusted with so many gems, on his walls.

And no king, no sultan, no khan, no czar, ever had a picture like this to hang on his walls.

It was the picture of a girl, of a young woman. She was sitting easily in a carved antique chair of a design that was carried out in the priceless diadem pushed high up on her head. At her breast, held on a chain that circled her throat, was a single glittering jewel so cleverly painted that it seemed to give off gleams of sparkling white light.

She was the most beautiful woman King had ever seen. Looking at her, he felt a sudden pulse of blood in his heart. This was the girl he had been searching for, ever since he was twenty. He had looked for her all over the earth, always hoping that somehow, around the next turning of the road, across from him at the next dinner party he attended, he would find her. He hadn't found her, but he had found her picture, painted, if he was any judge, by a better artist than had ever existed on earth. Da Vinci had not done better than this, Raphael, Van Dyke, Petty, Varga—they could all take lessons from this artist, this completely unknown perfect painter of perfect women.

THERE were other pictures to be seen. The walls, even the ceiling, was covered with them. King did not like them.

They were hunting scenes, every one of them. Here, in heavy jungle, grotesque little men were stalking a tiger. Armed with spears, another group was facing the charge of a lion. A third painting revealed a strange beast that King did not recognize.

"By the Lord Harry, that's a saber-tooth tiger!" someone grunted.

It was Cal Carson who had spoken. Carson had also been looking at the paintings.

"I was in the Field Museum in Chicago once," Carson said. "They had some pictures of animals that once lived on earth. This was one of them."

"Sure you're not mistaken?"

"Not a chance. You couldn't be wrong about those fangs. But how—" His voice faded into silence.

"How what?" King asked.

"I was wondering," Carson hesitantly answered. "The Museum scientists had found the bones of the saber-tooth tiger. Then they had figured out how he would look and the artist had drawn the picture. But—"

"I know," King interrupted. "I was thinking the same thing. There haven't been any saber-tooth tigers on earth for ten, twenty, maybe fifty thousand years. How did the guy who drew *these* pictures know that such a beast ever existed?"

"Do you suppose the fellow who drew these pictures actually *saw* a saber-tooth tiger?" Carson questioned.

King said nothing. There were other pictures. He liked these least of all. They were still hunting scenes but the prey that was being hunted was—men. The same grotesque little men in the flowing robes were the hunters. Their weapons were the same. But they were

hunting men.

A race of hunters, King thought. The people who drew these pictures had but one aim in life—to hunt.

Clicking, the door of the room opened. King whirled. Slaves entered. Carrying pitchers of steaming water, they removed a screen at one end of the room, revealed a bathtub carved out of a single piece of marble. By signs, they indicated they had come to bathe the three men. King shrugged, stepped forward, slipped out of his clothes. They were bathed, given clean, fresh clothes, allowed to rest. Then other slaves entered. They carried food. Delicate venison, bowls of fruit, a pleasant red wine. They ate until they could hold no more.

"It's food for a king," Cal Carson sighed. "But somehow I'd trade all of it for a couple of hamburgers with onions and some French fries. Sandy, what the hell have we got into anyhow?"

BEFORE King could attempt to answer, the door opened again. Six girls entered. They were shapely wenches, a little on the darkish side so far as complexion went, but shapely. King's jaw dropped when he realized why they had come.

"And I thought Mac was having hallucinations!" he gulped.

Carson looked sheepish, Sin Yul sat up, a sudden glitter appearing in his dark eyes at the sight of the women.

"Beat it!" King growled, waving toward the door.

Startled looks appeared on the faces of the girls. They did not understand the words but the gesture toward the door they did understand. They hesitated.

"Scram!" King yelled, pointing again to the door.

The girls, like frightened rabbits,

scampered out of the room. King faced the rather regretful gaze of Carson and the hot glare of Sin Yul.

"Girls, by damn! Why send away?" Sin Yul demanded.

"I want to see Akbad, not sluts!" King said flatly.

"Permission granted," a voice spoke from somewhere in the room.

King jerked around, seeking the source of the voice. Carson had risen to his feet. Sin Yul was crouched, his right hand digging at his girdle for the dagger that was not there.

The room was empty. When the voice spoke, the slaves who had brought in the food, dashed madly for the door. Strong sunlight streamed through the eastern window.

"There's a loudspeaker hidden here," King muttered.

"No," the voice contradicted. "I am here, in the room with you."

"What?"

"You would like to see me, no? Very well. Watch."

In the middle of the room, directly in the bright sunlight, was a sudden flurry of florescing lights, purples and violets. For a second they flared too brightly to watch. Then they were gone. In the spot where the lights had formed, a man stood.

He was tall, six feet six inches at least. And very thin. Skin the color of a green lemon was taut over a narrow, cameo-like face. A small narrow mouth; shoe-button-black, tired, sated, dissipated eyes.

"I am Akbad!" he said.

III

"IT'S a good trick," King bluntly said.

"You refer to my sudden appearance?" Akbad answered. "I agree. It is a good trick. *And I can do it.*"

"You can at that," King agreed. "But I still think it's a trick."

Akbad spread his hands. "Did I say it wasn't? But can you do it?"

"Well, no," King answered. "But I would like to learn. Mind telling me how you work it?"

Akbad's lemon face spread into a smile. "Really, now, even a guest can ask too much."

"Guests? Are we guests?"

"But of course you are my guests, for the time being."

"Hm," King mused. "Guests? Would you mind telling us what privileges we have as—ah—guests?"

"Delighted to tell you," Akbad answered. He waved his hands expansively and for a moment he looked like some far-fetched war millionaire showing off the treasures of his estate. "My guests get everything. While they remain with me, they have the best food obtainable in this wretched land, luxurious surroundings in which to live, beautiful paintings to stimulate the senses, every delight that ingenuity can create."

"Everything we want, we get?"

"Everything. Girls—"

"Including the privilege of walking out the front gate?" King interrupted.

"Of course!" Akbad said. "Nothing would delight me more. However—" regret showed in his voice—"it is my duty to warn you: there are certain dangers surrounding this castle and you might find a long journey would be a little on the difficult side. However, if you really want to leave me, it is your privilege. The man who was here—What was his name, now? For the moment it escapes me. Mackintosh. That was it. He chose the privilege of leaving my castle. Of course he went surprisingly, at night, in a way that he thought was safe. I believe he eventually discovered his error."

"Yes," King said grimly. "I believe Mack knew he had made a mistake, though he didn't admit it."

"He was not the admitting kind," Akbad said. "If I must say it, he was a most unreasonable person, not satisfied with anything we could do for him. We did everything to please him but still he was not satisfied. He was what you call a Yankee. Perhaps that explains it. The other Yankees were also difficult."

"You have had others?"

"A few," Akbad admitted. "Frankly, we are making plans to secure more of them, many more. We have found them admirably suited to our purposes. They are great players of the great game—"

"The great game?" King interrupted.

"Yes."

"What the hell is that?"

Akbad bowed. "In time you will find out," he answered.

Where he was standing, purple and violet lights floesced in a glow of blinding light. For a second the glow held. Then it disappeared. Akbad was gone.

King listened, watched closely. There was no sign of movement in the room, no whisper of movement. Somewhere behind one of the tapestries a door clicked softly. That was all.

Akbad was gone.

"SANDY, I don't like it," Carson said. "I'm going to see if maybe there isn't some way out of here."

While King watched, Carson began a slow, methodical search of the walls. King laid down, made no effort to help. Escaping from the room where they were held would not solve their problem nor even begin to solve it. Was there any solution, he wondered, trying to recall the tales he had heard of this country. In the two years he had spent in Burma he had heard many

stories, most of them too fantastic to credit. There was supposed to be an enchanted palace somewhere in these mountains, the natives said. Tigers with wings hid in the bamboo thickets. The natives, of course, were natural liars; but, after all, this was Burma. Thuggee was still a cult here. In this land—and the records proved it—was a clan who made a practice of committing murder. Civilizations had flourished here while Europe was a wilderness and America inhabited only by roving nomads. It was an old land, and all old lands have their memories of evil, memories too often founded in grim fact.

King tried to remember what he had heard. There was a story of a Professor Sorenson, a scientist of some kind, who had come to Upper Burma about five years before the war started. He had told the British authorities that he was an ethnologist and they had given him permission to go where he pleased. Somewhere up in this section, he had vanished. Then there were a few American airmen, forced down by engine failure in this land. Some of them had radioed that they were going down, few of them had ever come out. What had happened to the ones who had vanished? A B-29 had gone down up here. No member of its crew had ever reported in. Nor had an extensive search revealed what had happened to them.

Mackintosh—King remembered the note the ragged, exhausted native had slipped into his hands. A note from Mack, saying he had run into something big. Mack had hinted at rooms piled full of jewels and if King could make it up there, both of them would be rich. Mack had said that he was being held a kind of a prisoner but he had hinted he thought he could escape but he didn't want to escape until he had solved some mystery.

Mack hadn't said what the mystery was. He hadn't known. He was going to do some more looking around. "It's big, Sandy; so damned big I don't want to talk about it. But will you please get up here if you possibly can."

Mack was dead back there in a dark bungalow, a hole hurned through him.

KING resolutely forced himself not to think of the way Mack had died. That cursed floating billiard ball—what was it? Akhad controlled it; but what was it? Was it some kind of a mechanical device containing a microscopic but very powerful radio receiver and transmitter? Did it eject some kind of a ray, some burning beam that seared through human flesh? Or was it—a living creature, a horror out of some hell? He did not know. Nor did he know what Mackintosh had been talking about when he had said the thugs who were chasing him were playing a game. What sort of a game was it that had death as its object?

And Akhad—who was he? Mackintosh had had a great many doubts about Akhad. Mack had not even been certain that Akhad was human? Where had he learned to speak English? And if he wasn't human, what was he? King's mind was going round and round. Akhad's vanishing was startling but not terrifying. King knew that at least a scientific theory of a means of controlling invisibility had been worked out by scientists of the Western world. Here, in the Eastern world, it was perhaps possible that unknown scientists had gone from theory to fact, had succeeded in creating a cloak of invisibility. But—Always the doubt remained. What was Akhad? Was he human or was he—something else?

King was tired, so tired he could barely think. To meet the dangers he grimly suspected lay ahead of them, he

would need rest, all of it he could get. Forcing his mind to relax, he went to sleep.

He awakened with a start. Somewhere a drum was beating. He could hear the rhythmic pulsation through the door of the room. The sound was growing louder.

A dim radiance streamed through the windows of the room. He had slept the whole day through. Night had fallen. In the shadowed darkness he could hear Carson and Sin Yul stirring.

"Hear that, Sandy?" Carson whispered.

King nodded. His hand went to his hip feeling for the gun that was not there. The drum came nearer. The door opened.

Into the room, dancing, gyrating, pulsating with its milky radiance, came—the billiard ball. It darted upward, took up a position near the ceiling, continued its erratic dance.

Following it through the door came eight guards, with drawn knives.

King heard Carson grunt, heard Sin Yul hiss with fear. He rose slowly to his feet.

"Well?"

Akbad's voice came from far away.

"Follow where the guards take you."

TWO of the naked, black-skinned men took up the position of guides. The others fell in behind. By signs they indicated that King, Carson and Sin Yul were to fall in between the two groups. King did not move. He stood in the middle of the room, hands on hips.

"Ah!" said Akbad. There was no mistaking the voice but there was also no way to determine its source. One thing was certain: Akbad knew every move they made, or did not make. He might be in the room, he might be somewhere else. It was certain he was

watching them.

"Where are we going?" King said.

"To play the great game."

"What is that?"

Akbad laughed. There was no mirth in the sound. "In time, you will learn."

"What if we don't choose to learn?"

Akbad, as though a little surprised, hesitated. "In that case— But you don't have any choice."

"We always have a choice," King said grimly.

Akbad seemed to consider. "Yes, that is true," he admitted at last. "H'ai tang!" The last, in the foreign tongue, was spoken to the guards.

In the shadowed darkness King could not be quite certain how the guards reacted to whatever it was Akbad had said to them. They didn't move but he was aware of two things: that their eyes were fixed intently on him, and that they seemed to have stopped breathing.

He knew the signs.

"Do you insist on cboosing," Akbad questioned.

King sighed. "In the face of such persuasiveness, what can we do except obey?"

Motioning to Carson and Sin Yul to do likewise, he stepped into the place the guards had indicated. They seemed disappointed. "Some other time," he said, "you can use those knives."

The two guides started walking. King and his two companions followed. The trail led through a gigantic room that had apparently at one time been a banquet hall, across a courtyard open to the sky above, where he caught a glimpse of the mountain towering over them. Then they were led into a squat, round fortress set against the base of the cliff that towered overhead. Here other guards hastily opened a door. They entered a tunnel. Their guides procured torches, motioned them to

follow.

Behind them, twisting, gyrating, turning, came the billiard ball. It seemed to watch every move they made. King did not have to guess what would happen if they made a sudden dash for freedom.

The ball would follow them. As it had followed Mackintosh!

Walking was becoming difficult.

AN INVISIBLE wind blowing down the tunnel seemed to be pushing against them. He had to lean forward to make any progress. The guards, Carson, Sin Yul, were similarly affected.

"What the hell is making walking so hard?" Carson questioned.

"Don't know," King muttered.

The tunnel they were in seemed to follow the lines of an ancient cave. In places the walls had been dug away; in other places stone bridges had been erected over chasms. The boots of the Americans rang hollowly on the stone bridges. They crossed a chasm that seemed to lead down into the uttermost depths of the earth.

The invisible wind was blowing stronger. The guards were bent half over against it.

It wasn't a wind. There was no discernable movement of air. It was a pressure, a growing pressure, like the force of an accelerating body of air.

A wind that wasn't blowing a wind. King could feel depths of chill creeping through his body. Where were these guards taking them? What kind of a game was played here in the heart of this mountain?

They came to a round chamber. The guides stopped. Holding their torches as high as they could reach, they motioned for King and his companions to step forward.

The invisible wind was strongest

here. It seemed to have its source here in this round chamber in the heart of the mountain. Gingerly, very slowly, King stepped forward.

The pressure was so strong he could barely move against it. It pulsed through his body, seemed to reach every molecule of his being, a torrent of invisible wind. He leaned forward, kept leaning forward. At this angle, he should fall. He didn't fall. The invisible wind buoyed him up, lifted him, kept him from falling. Sin Yul and Carson followed slowly behind him.

The guards remained at the entrance, not entering the round chamber.

The cave, cavern, chamber, hole—whatever it was—was in solid granite. Apparently some titanic convulsion of the earth in long gone ages had created a bubble here. When this granite was cooling lava in a gigantic earth cistern a gas bubble had formed this round chamber. The granite had cooled; the chamber had remained.

A chamber through which flowed a torrent of invisible wind.

"Goodbye," Akbad whispered, far away.

The pressure grew stronger. For an instant King had the impression that mad winds were howling savagely around him. The winds seemed to pick him up, to toss him as a straw is tossed by a hurricane. He was lifted, thrown, tossed in a dozen directions at once.

His last impression was that he was falling.

Like a light that is turned off, consciousness faded out.

IV

"BETTER get movin', Bub," the voice said. It was a tired voice, not much interested in what it was saying. King listened. He did not open his eyes.

He was not sure he had the strength to open them. He was not at all certain he wanted to see what opening his eyes would reveal. Thousands of little pains that felt like microscopic red hot needles jabbing him were running through his body. He felt as if he had been wrenched, that every muscle and bone in his body had been turned in the wrong direction and then had been inexpertly returned to their proper positions. He lay very still wondering how a man who hurt as much as he did could possibly be alive. The pain that swept through him was the granddaddy of all aches. It was spelled with a capital P. It was the biggest pain that had ever existed.

The tired voice spoke again. "Better get movin', boys," it said.

Still he did not move.

A second voice spoke. It was a quick voice, speaking with the rapidity of a chirping bird.

"Maybethey'redead," it said. It spoke so rapidly that all the words ran together.

King didn't move. If he was dead he wouldn't much care. What had happened to him? He tried to remember. His mind was foggy. Vaguely he recalled a man named Akhad who had talked about playing some kind of a game.

Near him someone sighed. The sigh turned into a groan.

"If they're not dead, they soon will be," the tired voice observed.

Experimentally, King moved an arm. To his surprise, the arm moved. He thought about that.

"Isawoneofthemmove!" the bird voice excitedly chirped. "They're alive. Weoughttoget'emoutofthere!"

"Why?" the tired voice reasonably asked. "If they die there, they won't have to try to stay alive in this damned country. Besides, I'm tired."

"Weoughtaget'emout," the bird voice stubbornly insisted.

"You get 'em out," the tired voice said. "You go down there and carry them up."

The bird voice was silent.

SANDY KING lay still. He had discovered a new fact; something that felt a little like the pressure of running water and a little more like the blast of wind from the prop of a P-47, was running or blowing over him. It was pushing against him, nudging him, trying to shove him. He thought about this water or wind. Somehow he didn't like it.

Near him he was vaguely aware someone was whispering rapidly in a mixture of languages that sounded like Chinese, Burmese, and Jap. The groan came again. He thought about moving, about opening his eyes. Either one was simply too much effort.

"What's happening here?" a third voice spoke. It was a woman's voice and it was as sharp as a whip. Plainer than words, it said that the speaker had already seen what was going on and didn't like it in the least.

The shock of hearing a woman speak forced King to open his eyes. He shut them again almost instantly. The sunlight blinded him. In the one glance he saw that he was in a cup-like depression apparently carved out of solid rock. Standing on the edge of the depression, looking down at him, were two ragged, bearded men. Behind the men were trees. The third person on the edge of the depression was a girl.

"Why didn't you get them out of there?" she was demanding. The men, looking shamefaced, were starting down the edges of the cup. The girl was ahead of them. Wearing sandals, her only garment made out of animal skins, she came down the sloping edge of the cup with the lithe agility of a deer.

King tried to get to his feet. He succeeded only in sitting up. The girl bent over him. She had blue eyes and smooth brown skin and freckles on her nose.

"How do you feel?" she said.

"Better, now that I've seen you." He wiped sweat from his forehead. "Would you—ah mind—I'm a little vague. But, where am I? And what happened? I have hazy memories—Oh, hello, Cal. Were you doing that groaning?"

FOR the first time he noticed his two companions were still with him. Carson was getting groggily to his feet. Sin Yul, blinking almond eyes, was trying to crawl toward the edge of the cup.

"I was doin' the groanin'," Carson answered. "Feel like doin' some more of it." His eyes went around the cup, took in the trees growing on the ledges above, went from the girl to the two bearded men who had now scrambled down and stood beside her. "Last thing I remember, Sandy, we were back there in Akbad's cave. A wind was blowin'—It's still blowin', by golly! I can feel it! But—what happened, Sandy?"

"That's what I was just asking this lady," King answered.

"We'll talk about that later," the girl spoke. "Right now we've got to get out of here."

"Okay, partner, up you come," one of the men said, bending over King and helping him to his feet. He was the tired voice that King had heard. "Name's Greg," he said. "Greg Dawson. Let's get moving. When Leda says we've got to get out of here, she knows what she is talking about."

Dawson helped King to the base of the wall, started to help him up, but long before they got to the top it was King who was helping Dawson instead of the other way around. King realized why Dawson had sounded tired, why

he had made no effort to descend the walls of the cup and help them. Dawson was as tired as his voice indicated. The man was completely worn out. He was panting heavily before they scaled the wall.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "Not much left in me."

"What's wrong?" King asked.

"Wrong? Oh, nothing much. It was just my turn to run yesterday. I'm kind of fagged out today."

"Run?" King questioned. There was something in Dawson's tone of voice that horrified him.

"Yes. Oh. I forgot you didn't know about the running. Well, you'll learn soon enough."

BEFORE King could question him further the girl Leda was urging them to be moving. Leading away from the cup, was a barely defined path that resembled a game trail. She plunged into it. Around them and behind the walls of the forest closed up. King had seen jungle before, the thick, heavy growths of the tropical rain forests but he had never seen jungle like this. The trees were giants rising hundreds of feet into the air. Clinging to them, descending from them, were masses of vines. King was perturbed by three things. He did not recognize any of the trees. They were all new specimens to him. There were no animals, no birds of any kind, in this forest. The jungle was ideal for them but they were not here. The thick foliage of the trees overhead closed a roof over them. Down on the ground everything was cool and dark. Somewhere in the distance King heard, or fancied he heard, the droning of a vast pipe organ. Somehow the sound sent a chill through his body.

The girl led them at a rapid pace, too rapid for Dawson, who motioned

for them to go on and dropped behind. King noticed that Leda was leading them over hard ground where it was possible and that she was apparently making every effort to hide their trail. She never moved a leaf on the ground, never broke a twig, never disturbed a piece of mould.

"They might find our trail," she explained, in answer to King's question.

"They?" he asked. "Who are you talking about?"

She did not answer but King noticed that she was constantly on the alert. Her eyes watched every tree, every open space, every break in the foliage above them. She moved with the lithe alertness of an Indian who suspects danger and to whom alertness is second nature.

"This way," she said, pointing to a stretch of solid rock at the base of an overhanging cliff. "Keep close to the cliff."

In single file, they followed. Somewhere around was the sound of falling water. She led them to it. A river flowing from the higher ground dropped fifteen or twenty feet in a waterfall. Below the pool was an eddy of green water that constantly circled back under the waterfall.

"Follow me," the girl said. She dived into the pool, cutting the surface of the water with hardly a ripple. King hesitated. Her head appeared. Treading water, she moved with the circling eddy toward the waterfall, motioning for him to follow. He dived into the pool. Splashes as he came to the surface told him that Carson and Sin Yul had followed. The eddy promptly carried them behind the fall. There Leda, her short dress of tanned skin glistening with drops of water as it clung to her, extended a hand to help them up on the ledge where she was waiting. A natural cave, dark and wet, led off into

subterranean passages.

"We have survived because of this cave," she said. "They haven't found it yet."

AGAIN the allusion to the mysterious "They." Again she did not choose to explain. Instead, telling King to take her hand, and Sin Yul to take King's hand, and Carson to do the same and bring up the rear, she led them into the cave. King did not resist. Like blind lambs, they might be following her to the slaughter. King trusted her. She had blue eyes and freckles on her nose and she spoke English. But, for that matter, Akbad had spoken English.

The trail she followed led upward but the climbing was somehow easy, much easier than climbing out of the pit had been. Here the invisible wind was not buffeting them. King realized the wind had not blown outside the pit.

King lost all track of distance. They might have gone a mile, or five miles. In the darkness, he had no way of knowing. Leda entered a small natural room. Through an opening in the farther wall sunlight was streaming. The place was primitively furnished. Several wicker chairs, apparently hand made, a table chopped out of tree trunks, two beds covered with the skins of animals.

There was a man in the room. He rose when they entered.

"I want you to meet my father," Leda said.

The man was tall and thin. His clothing was in tatters, his cheeks were hollow, his face covered with a beard. Like Dawson, he looked like a person who was tired. Only his eyes were alive. He shook hands with them, inquired their names.

"I can't say that I'm glad to see you," he said. "For your sakes, I am sorry. But you are here and that is

that. My name is Sorenson, James Sorenson, one time of the department of natural history of the Field Museum—"

"Sorenson!" King gasped. "Not Professor Sorenson!"

Sorenson bowed. "The same," he said. "You have heard of me?" He seemed pleased.

"Only that you disappeared, as we seem to have disappeared, somewhere in Burma several years ago."

Sorenson fixed him with keen eyes. "Yes," he said at last. "My daughter and I disappeared. And since you are here, of course you disappeared in the same manner."

"Well," King said. "Then at last we've come to the place where we can find out something."

Sorenson smiled, a little gravely. "Some things I can answer," he nodded. "But all things, no. No, there are things here in this cursed land and things about that infernal temple where Akbad rules that I do not even begin to understand. But what I know I will tell you." He shook his head, hesitating as if not knowing quite where to begin, then started his story.

V

"THE first question I want to ask," King said, "is: Where are we?"

It was the question he had been carefully keeping out of his mind ever since he had regained consciousness in the cup, in the pit in the granite. Where were they? A wind had pushed at them. It had blown them—where?

Sorenson nodded gravely. "I know," he said, sympathy in his voice. "I wish I could tell you where you are. It would help you. It would even help me."

"You mean, you don't know?"

"I'm afraid I don't" the scientist an-

swered. He tugged at his beard, half shut his eyes in a fretful frown. "The name of this place I do know. Akkan. But whether Akkan is earth a million years after we knew it, or earth a million years before the human race appeared on it, or whether Akkan is one of the planets of our solar system, or whether it is a planet of a solar system ten thousand light years from earth—I do not know."

"What?" King shouted. "What in thunder are you talking about?"

Like mad ghosts, Sorenson's words were dancing through his mind. The earth as it was a million years in the past! The earth as it might be a million years in the future! Maybe not even earth! Maybe some other planet of the solar system, maybe a planet belonging to an entirely different system! Was Sorenson mad? Was this the drivel of a warped mind?

"That's right," Sorenson answered. His voice was firm and calm. "I don't know. I don't know whether even Akbad knows, whether those devils out there"—he gestured toward the round hole that served as a window—"whether they know. You see, where we are all depends on where the earth current took us."

"Earth current?" King questioned.

"You felt it in the pit," Leda spoke in explanation. "It felt like a wind. That wind is what Daddy calls the earth current."

"Yes," Sorenson nodded. "That is the earth current. Exactly what it is I don't know but I think it is a natural earth current, a flow of some unknown force. It is like gravity except that gravity is a known earth current that effects everyone everywhere. This current is unknown and, on earth, it seems to exist only in the heart of one particular mountain in an unexplored region of Upper Burma."

KING nodded grimly. He was familiar with gravity and he could not well doubt that other, similar currents could exist. Whether Sorenson knew what he was talking about or not, King could not doubt that the earth current actually existed. He had felt the pressure of that invisible wind. He remembered its buffetings too vividly to doubt its existence.

"But—" he said.

"We came through the heart of that same mountain," Sorenson nodded toward Leda. "We were Akbad's guests too, and so was Dawson, and everyone else who was ever here. The earth current picked us up in that mountain and carried us here. The catch is—I don't know where it carried us."

He hesitated, groping for words. "Supposing you entered a cave and fell into an underground river. The water carried you away. You lost consciousness. Eventually you regained consciousness and found yourself in a strange land, miles away from your starting point. The earth current is exactly like an underground river. It picks you up. It carries you away. Eventually it deposits you here. But where it has taken you, you don't know."

"You have to know," King insisted.

"No, you don't" Sorenson answered. "You don't know a damned thing about it and neither do I. The current may have carried you through time, it may have carried you through space, or it may have carried you through both time and space. You don't know what that current does to you after it has picked you up. So, when I say I don't know where we are, except that we are in the land of Akkan and that Akkan may be almost anywhere in the universe, I mean exactly what I say." He gestured toward the opening that served as a window. "Out there at night the

sky is full of stars. I'm not an astronomer by any means but I've done a lot of exploration in my life. At times I've had to find my way by the stars, with the result that I know every major constellation on earth. Night after night, ever since we came here, I've watched the stars in the sky of Akkan. If Akkan were on earth, I would recognize some of the constellations. Of course, after the passing of a million years, the position of the stars would have changed so much as to be unrecognizable, which is why I say we may be on earth in the far past or the far future. Because, watching those stars for a sign post to tell me where we are, I have not yet seen a constellation that I recognized."

THE hard words rammed home. Not only the words but the sincere manner in which they were spoken convinced King that Sorenson knew what he was talking about. The scientist was telling the truth.

The truth was—They were lost. Lost in the immensity of space of time, lost no telling where.

Akbad had hurled them here.

Why?

What was the reason why that skinny monster had hurled them into the world of Akkan?

King looked at Sorenson.

The scientist was nodding. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "You want to know why Akbad tossed you into the earth current. The reason is not hard to find. Akbad is a procurer for the imperial game preserves of Akkan. His duty in that cursed temple of his—and he fulfills it faithfully—is to procure game for the stocking of the royal preserves."

King's mind was racing. He noticed Carson. Carson had been carefully following the conversation. Carson

looked scared now. Rare indeed had been the times when he had seen Carson show fear. Sin Yul's brown face had turned almost yellow. Dawson, who had entered alone, was sunk on one of the mats, a sickly grin on his face. Leda had moved to the window, was looking out, her face averted.

"Game?" King said huskily. "Game for the preserves? What are you talking about?"

"We are that game," Sorenson said grimly. "Just as, on earth, a few millionaires owned game preserves where they raised game to hunt, so, on Akkan, there are royal preserves. The game the Akkans prefer to hunt, instead of deer or bear or lions or elephants, is human beings."

His grim voice slipped into silence. The great game! Mackintosh had talked about a game, had said the murderers on his heels had been playing a game. This was the game, a hunting game, the hunting of humans! It was not without historical precedents, of a sort. The Romans, in the days of the decadence of Rome, had put gladiators in the ring to hunt humans. The Akkans used humans as their prey in the game preserves.

King swallowed, braced his shoulders. "I think they will find we are rather tough game," he said.

"They've already made that discovery," Sorenson answered. "That's why they like humans in their preserves, because men are good fighters, because they fight back, because they're hard to catch and hard to bring down. Because men make excellent sport! These are the reasons why they like us. We give them a good scrap before we go down. What is it, Leda?"

FROM the window, the girl was motioning for them to come near.

"Look!" she whispered.

Below the window was a long, sloping valley. Heavily forested, a stream wound down the center. A rocky glade was visible almost immediately below the opening.

King's eyes swept the valley, jerked abruptly to a halt. He had been looking down, searching for what Leda had seen. The thing she saw was not down there on the valley floor. It was hanging in the air not fifty feet from the opening.

A clear bubble of glass! It hung in the air like a huge raindrop glistening in the sunlight. It was slightly flattened at the bottom. On one side a door was visible and the interior revealed some simple machinery, apparently used to control the bubble. King's eyes were not on the bubble. His whole attention was concentrated on the occupant.

Standing erect in the bubble, controlling it while she keenly scrutinized the ground below, was a girl.

It was the girl whose picture had hung on the wall of Akbad's temple, the girl who had been painted by that master artist whose marvelous work had been on display.

A painting of her was in Akhad's temple. Here, in Akkan, she rode in a bubble of glass. King's heart leaped when he saw her. At this distance, there was no chance of his being mistaken. It was the same girl. She was so near he could see the graceful curve of her throat, the alert way she turned head as she scanned the ground below.

"Who—who is that?"

King heard Leda's sharp indrawn breath. Glancing at her, he saw that her face had gone completely white.

"That—that is Avena," she whispered. "She—she is the princess of Akkan."

"What is she doing there?"

"Watch!"

Out of the corner of his eyes, he caught a flicker of movement in the glade below. Down there a man had darted out of the growth of trees, had looked around, and then hastily had darted back. The movement was so fast that King was not certain he had seen it. But Avena had seen it. King saw her move the controls in the glass bubble. It slipped soundlessly through the air, hung over the glade, poised there. From an opening in one side of the glass bubble a tiny white sphere was released. King's first thought was that Avena had dropped a bomb. Then he recognized the sphere.

A BILLIARD ball! One of Akbad's floating billiard balls! The same kind of milky white sphere that had passed completely through Mackintosh!

"Lord!" he whispered.

"You know what the white ball is?" Leda asked.

"I know what it *does*," he answered. "I saw a man down there. Who was it?"

"Dillon," the girl answered. "You remember him. He was with Dawson at the pit when I came up."

"I remember him. Bird-voice. He ran all his words together. But what's he doing down there?"

"It is his turn," Leda answered, "to run today."

"His turn to run—"

"Watch!"

The glass sphere of Avena hung poised over the trees. Below it, the little white ball was darting in and out among the branches something like a bird dog covering an overgrown field in search of the scent of prey. Ahead, in the glade, was another flash of movement as Dillon showed himself for an instant. Instantly Avena sent her glass

bubble toward him, the billiard ball whirling out of the trees and dashing ahead of her. King caught his breath.

"You are watching," Leda's slow voice said, "the hunting of Avena."

"So I gathered," King said. His voice was dry and raspy, like a dull file cutting soft metal. In his mind was turmoil. On Akbad's palace wall he had seen the painting of this girl; she had looked to him like everything that was beautiful and good. The instant he had seen the picture he had known that all his life he had been looking for her. Now he had found her, in the incredible land of Akkan, riding in a bubble of glass, a huntress of men. The thought was a knife turning in his heart. He watched the scene below.

Avena in her glass sphere hovered over the spot where Dillon had last been seen, the billiard ball ranging through the trees below her. Now it was visible, now it was hidden. Down there somewhere, King knew Dillon must be watching for it, his head turning nervously, watching, trying to hide. King knew what Bird-voice was thinking. Death was looking for Dillon and Dillon knew it. Suddenly the glass bubble moved again, farther away this time.

"He's showing himself too often," Leda said fiercely. "He's taking too many chances."

KING silently watched the hunt continue. Avena in her glass bubble hung poised over the forest, poised and watchful. A big game hunter on the slope of a hill, knowing there was a deer in a thicket down below him, would look like this, peering intently down, his gun ready. Avena moved silently, following her prey. Each time she moved, she went farther away. Suddenly the glass bubble stopped moving.

Dim and far off, but still frantic with fear, a scream trembled in the air. It swiftly died into silence. King watched. Avena sent her glass huddled down into the trees. For a minute she was out of sight. Then the sphere rose into the air again. Dangling on a hook below it, was a human body. Swiftly it slid away into the distance. Avena was taking her game home. Another mounted head for her trophy room. King turned away. Leda, her head pillowed on her arm, was leaning against the wall. Her shoulders were shaking with sobs.

"One thing I would like to ask," King said. "You said it was his turn to run today? What did you mean?"

Leda turned. The tears were bright on her cheeks. "We take turns," she said.

"Go on."

She dabbed at her eyes. "This cave is the only place that is safe," she explained. "The Akkan don't know it exists. As long as they don't discover it, we are fairly safe. But when a hunting party comes near here, one of us goes out—to lure them away, so they won't find us."

Sorenson coughed. "There is another reason why we don't want them here," he hesitantly said.

King's eyes were on the girl. "So Dillon deliberately exposed himself?" he questioned.

She nodded.

King swallowed. Bird-voice, that little man, had been a hero. Remembering the way Dillon had looked, his ragged clothes, unshaven face, careless manner, it was hard to think of him as a hero. But you couldn't tell what was inside a man by the way he looked. Inside, Dillon had had everything that a man might need.

A sudden thought shot through King's mind, jerked his eyes back to

the girl. "We take turns?" he snapped. "Does that mean that you—you—"

Fire flashed in her eyes. "Of course I take my turn. Everyone does, except Daddy, and we won't let him do it, because—because—" Her voice faltered, stopped.

King did not need to be told why Sorenson was not permitted to take a turn in the grim game of hide and seek played through the forest outside. The scientist wouldn't have a chance out there. He was too old for games, especially for games played here in the land of Akkan.

DAWSON was sitting on the floor. "It was my turn to run yesterday," he said slowly. "I was lucky. I got away. Mostly we do."

"Oh."

Dawson's fingers balled into fists, the knuckles showing white. Muscles knotted at the corners of his jaws. "Dillon was the best damned tail gunner who ever knocked a Zero out of the sky," he said slowly. "Sometime—sometime maybe I'll get a chance to get even for him. Sometime, damn them—" He choked, rose abruptly, stumbled from the room. King watched him go. Dawson, then, and Dillon had been American fliers forced down in Upper Burma. Some of those fliers had come here. King knew the feeling members of the same crew of fighting men had for each other and he knew how Dawson felt.

"Next time it's my turn," he said.

"And after that, it'll be my turn," Carson spoke.

Sin Yul gibbered some unintelligible words under his breath.

Sorenson plucked at King's sleeve. "There is another reason why we do not wish the Akkans to discover this cave," he said. "Come, I will show you."

VI

SORENSEN felt his way through the darkness, pushed against what seemed to be solid stone. Slowly a section of stone moved away. Light streamed through an open door. The scientist motioned for King to follow.

The room that lay beyond the door was large. Soft glow lamps shed a sheen of blue light from the ceiling.

The room was full of machinery and men.

The men startled King. Although he hadn't had time to think about it, he had assumed that Sorenson and Leda, Dawson, Carson, Sin Yul and himself were the only humans in Akkan. But there were men here, fifteen to twenty of them. All of them as busy as boys stopping holes in the dyke.

"Technicians," Sorenson explained, pride in his voice. "Some were radio operators, some navigators, some of them were pilots. It seems a war had started—" he sounded puzzled "—and these men were flying bombers until they made forced landings in Upper Burma—"

"I know about that," King said.

"Oh. Well, Akbad gathered them up and sent them here and they brought with them some knowledge I had needed badly, but had lacked. You see, I am a scientist of sorts, but I know nothing about radio or high frequency electro-magnetic radiations, or things of that kind. These men do know these things, and—" Pride showed in his voice, and more than pride, hot anger, and a grimness too deep for words—"with their help we have almost completed something that will surprise the hunting parties of Akkan when they enter the game preserves."

He pointed toward the far side of the room. A glass bubble similar to the one in which Avena had ridden was sit-

ting there. Dismantled now, every part stripped from it. All over the room men were working with these parts, studying them, poring over them.

"That bubble fell out of control," Sorenson explained. "The Akkan who was riding in it broke his neck." He sounded happy about that. "The boys tell me they have solved the mystery of its operation. Hillson there," he pointed to a stooped, black-haired man who was squatting down and staring at the stripped bubble through thick-lensed glasses, "has been most helpful. He was an expert on electro-dynamics before he entered the army and I suspect was something of a fanatic on the subject. Isn't that right, Hillson?"

Spoken to, Hillson grinned. "Aw, Doc," he said. "What if I was a little nuts? You don't have to tell everybody about my weakness." He looked King over. "A new rookie, eh? Glad to have you with us. Do you know anything about electro-dynamics?"

"I'm afraid I don't," King admitted.

"Oh, well—" Hillson had already lost interest in him and had turned back to the glass bubble. King grinned. He knew the type. The only thing that interested Hillson was that glass bubble and how it worked, especially how it worked. Hillson was the type that had kept the bombers flying, the fighters going up, in spite of hell and high water, the mechanical geniuses that America had produced in such large numbers, men who had seemed to need only a strip of tin, a length of wire, a couple of dry cells, and a pair of pliers to build anything.

ALL the men in the room seemed to be of this type. King had seen grease monkeys digging into a motor looking for a bug. They kept looking until they found it. He had seen colonels come down to watch a crew going

over a plane, he had seen the colonels stand around and watch and itch for a while, then grab a wrench and dig in and damn the rank.

A sandy-haired youth—he didn't look like he was out of his teens—pulled at the scientist's sleeve.

"Dr. Sorenson?" he said timidly.

"Ralph? What is it, my boy?"

"I think I've got it, sir."

"You think you've got it!"

"I'm not sure, of course, but I think—"

Sorenson was following the youth across the room. He had forgotten all about King. Sorenson stared at something on the bench.

"Everybody come here," he called excitedly.

The men left their work and clustered around the scientist and the youth. Even Hillson reluctantly dragged himself away from his beloved glass hubble. A hushed air of excitement fell over the room. King followed the group.

"Show them, Ralph; show them what you have discovered," Sorenson urged.

King leaned forward, saw what lay on the bench. It was one of those damnable billiard balls, one of those horrible instruments of death that Akbad and Avena had used! He caught his breath.

The sandy-haired youth picked up the billiard ball. "I think," he said, "I think I've discovered how these things work."

"Show us!" Sorenson said.

The youth laid the ball back on the bench. He picked up what seemed to be a rather unusual finger ring set with a single large glittering jewel.

"We got these from the dead Akkan," he explained, slipping the ring on his finger.

"Watch, now."

He made no move, did not in any

way attempt to manipulate the ring. A look of concentration appeared on his face, deepened. He was holding up his hand for all to see the ring. Slowly, a tone at a time, the jewel was changing color. It had been white when he had picked it up. Now, as the look of concentration deepened on his face, the stone was becoming a soft violet color. Oblivious of everything else, he watched the ring, concentrating his gaze on the jewel. A minute ticked by, another.

"Watch out!" someone yelled.

THE billiard ball had risen from the bench and was floating in the air. King's instantaneous thought was that this damnable menace had somehow come to life and was loose in the room, threatening all of them with the terrible death that lay within it. His hand dived toward the gun that should have been holstered at his hip, came away empty. He crouched. He knew how deadly that hall was. The others knew it too. Their reaction was involuntary. Except for Sorenson and the youth, they ducked. Hillson reached for a wrench.

"There is no danger," the youth called out. "I'm making it move. Watch!"

His gaze still concentrated on the jewel in the ring, the lines of concentration deepened on his face. He did not look at the hall, but apparently at his command, it began to dart about the room, ducking, swerving, going through the agile dance that King so well remembered. All eyes were focused on it. Slowly, it came back to the bench, came to rest.

The youth sighed, wiped perspiration from his face, removed the ring.

A babble of voices broke out.

"Ralph Rogers, how does that damned thing work?"

"Is it radio controlled, Ralph?"

The youth dabbed at the sudden perspiration on his forehead. "It is not radio controlled," he said. "It is more subtle than that. I am not quite certain but I am almost sure it is controlled by means of thought radiation. It is made of a peculiar type of crystal that has the property not only of defying gravity but of moving and changing its characteristics in accordance with the mental commands of the person in control of it. The real secret is in the ring and the ball is controlled through that. The ring was originally attuned to the personality of its Akkan owner. I managed to alter the tuning, to bring it to resonance with the radiations from my own mind. Later, I'll tell you how I did that. Now it is sufficient to tell you that you can see and hear and speak through the ball, you can send it anywhere you want it to go, and if you so desire, you can cause it to emit a type of radiation that will sear through almost anything that stands in its way—"

KING was no longer listening. No mechanic, how the ball worked was not as important to him as it was to this group of wizard gadgeteers. The important thing to him was—they had a weapon with which to fight the Akkans.

"If we can get a supply of those balls—" he whispered. "Sorenson, where can we get some more of those things?"

The scientist turned to him. "The only source I know is the armory of the Akkar, in the city."

"Then that's where I'm going," King said.

Faces turned toward him. He was a newcomer in the group. They didn't know him, didn't know what he could or couldn't do. They were sizing him

up. Hillson looked him over as if he were a special kind of glass bubble. Rogers, the sandy-haired youth, stared at him. Sorenson's shrewd gaze reappraised him.

"Shall we give this mission to Captain King?" the scientist questioned.

One by one through the group voices began to speak.

"He looks like the man for the job."

"I think, if anybody can do it, he can."

"Okay by me."

King grinned. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said. "When do I start?"

VII

"THERE is Akka, city of Akkan," Sorenson said, pointing.

They were on the side of a hill, looking down. Below them, miles in extent, lay the city. Stone buildings lined broad streets bordered by gigantic trees. Parks were visible everywhere, with fountains shooting sprays high into the air. A few glass bubbles were visible, lazily ascending or descending, floating through the air carrying Akkar riders on errands. Vaguely audible was the sound of music, weird, unearthly, the soft, sighing strains of some tremendous pipe organ.

King looked at the city. Here a race had labored for generations—centuries past the counting—piling gray slabs of stone on top of other stones, building a city, developing a civilization, creating arts, investigating the sciences. The builders of Akkan had been artists, the graceful lines of the buildings, the way the parks were laid out, proved that. They had been scientists, the glass bubbles, the deadly floating balls, proved that. *Had been.* Automatically, without quite realizing why he did it, King put the accomplishments of the Akkar in the past. They had made steps to-

ward greatness, building this city as a monument to their efforts. But something had happened. They had gone so far and then had stopped. Their city was falling away into ruins. The buildings, many of them, were falling down, the roofs falling in, needed repair work not done. Rubble from falling buildings had spewed into the streets. No effort had been made to clear it away.

"They made their bid for greatness," Sorenson was speaking. "You can see the evidence of it down there. But something happened to them and they fell short of their goal, stopped development, started backward. Yes, something happened—"

He sounded a little sad.

"What do you think happened to them?" King questioned.

"Possibly the land no longer produced food in sufficient abundance," Sorenson answered. "Maybe the climate changed. Possibly they ceased reproducing in sufficient numbers. A number of things may have happened. Sometimes races just seem to lose the will to live and start dying away. In this case, I think I know what happened. They persisted in clinging to a basic pattern that is sound for a primitive tribe but which spells doom to any race that tries to cling to it in more advanced stages of civilization."

"What pattern is that?" King asked.

"THE hunting pattern," the scientist answered. "Where hunting is necessary for life itself, hunting is justifiable. But the Akkar reached a level of existence where hunting was no longer necessary. For thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of years, they were forced to hunt to live. Then the time came when they no longer had to hunt, but—hunting was so much a part of them that they could not give it up. So they

continued it, and it became a perversion with them. Instead of hunting game for food—hunting to live—they began to hunt for thrills. This was all right, as long as hunting was only a relaxation, but they began to seek more and more thrills, and the time finally came—I'll bet on it—when they were hunting their own kind, for fun. No race that hunts its own kind can continue to exist. So, the Akkar started down. Their development stopped, they began to retrogress, to go backward. If we ever discover their full history, I think we will learn that the glass airships they use were invented hundreds of years ago and no improvements have been made since they were invented, that all the rest of their science is falling into decay—"

Sorenson's voice droned on, expounding the rise and fall of races. The scientist knew his stuff, but King was only half listening. It did not matter much to him how the Akkar had developed. It was enough to know that they were here and were a deadly menace not only to him but to every other human whom Akbad had thrust into the earth current. He remembered what Akbad had said. "You Yanks make excellent players of the great game. In the future, we hope that more of you will have the opportunity of playing."

Plans might be going forward to dump humans by the car-load lot here in this damnable game preserve! They would not be hard to obtain. King did not know how powerful the glass airships were but he suspected that terrible powers were leashed within them. Fifty of those bubbles, appearing on earth, might be a match for all the air fleets the Allies possessed, fleets already disbanded or in the process of being broken up. What would happen if the Akkar came out of Akkan and with Akbad to lead them, descended on New

York, or Chicago, or San Francisco? King preferred not to think about that.

"How many Akkar do you think there are?" he asked Sorenson.

"Fifty thousand—a hundred thousand. Who knows?" the scientist answered. "I have stood here on this hillside and watched them swarming by the thousands down there in the city, during one of their festivals. I can't guess their numbers. Too many. That much is sure. For that reason, you must be very careful in attempting to find and enter their armory. If they catch you, get a hint that we are here, they will swarm over these hills by the thousands looking for us."

King nodded. He had seen how carefully the men in the cave laboratory had looked him over before they agreed to let him try to enter the city. Their lives were in his hands. If he failed, the Akkar would come looking for them. No doubt the Akkar would be pleased. New game to hunt!

"I don't intend to get caught," he said. "Ready, Ralph?"

ROGERS nodded. The sandy-haired youth was going with him, for several reasons, chief of them being that he knew how to operate the floating ball. If they could penetrate the storehouse where the balls were kept, Rogers would be invaluable in determining what to take and what to leave behind. In his pockets, he had a small kit of tools to make adjustments on the floating balls, if they managed to obtain any. Rogers grinned. "Let's hop off," he said.

"Cal," King said, turning to Carson.

"I think I ought to go along, Sandy," Carson said. "Damn it, you may get into a spot where I would come in handy."

"I think I ought to go too," Leda interrupted. "After all, I've been al-

most inside the city and I know the way."

King grinned. "Cal, your job is to wait just outside the city, and if we're not back by tomorrow night, to come looking for us."

"You do all the work while I sit out here and twiddle my thumbs," Carson grumbled. "Damn it, Sandy, I belong in this thing with you."

"No sale, Cal. Your job—to sit around and wait—is as tough as mine and I know it. As for you, Leda—*Look out!*"

Looking over Leda's shoulder, King saw one of the floating balls. In the air over the trees at the base of the cliff, he glimpsed—a floating glass bubble. It had come on silent wings, floating just over the tops of the trees, and was upon them before they had the slightest warning of its presence. Peering eagerly down from the huddle was—Avena.

The huntress of Akkan was hunting again.

For a split second the floating ball danced behind Leda. Before she had time to move, it darted straight toward her. King flung her to one side, the darting ball passing over his shoulder. It passed so close to him he could hear it hiss.

"Into the trees, everybody!" he yelled.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Sorenson, Carson, and Rogers leap down the hill. Leda, with lithe agility, scrambled to one side. King stood in the center of the opening. Over his head, the ball buzzed like an angry hornet. He did not move. He made no attempt to hide.

It was his turn to run!

Yesterday Dillon had done the running, Dawson the day before. Today was King's turn.

He watched the ball.

IF IT came toward him, he was ready to try to dodge, but he had to give the others time to escape. He could hear a thrashing in the undergrowth as Sorenson and Rogers fought their way downhill. Leda had disappeared. He was all alone in the glade. Above him, the ball was darting in circles. In the glass bubble above the tree tops, he could see Avena looking down. She seemed surprised. Perhaps the fact that he did not run had startled her into momentary inaction.

"Run!" Leda called, from somewhere out of sight.

Simultaneously the ball moved toward him.

He leaped headfirst into the shelter of the trees. Behind him something went brr-br-brr-rrr like a small but vicious P-51 going into a power dive. An excited voice was yelling. Avena, screaming with the thrill of the chase, the ball transmitting her voice.

"Tallyho!"

All that was needed was the sound of the hunter's horn, the bugling of the hounds, to make this a fox-hunting scene. King, racing through the trees, knew how the fox felt when he heard the baying of the dogs on his trail. It wasn't a good feeling. Compounded of hot rage and icy fear, it seemed to send surges of ice water racing through his veins.

Brr-br-rrr-brrr.

The ball buzzed like a hornet. Over his shoulder, King caught a glimpse of it. Ducking and dancing, it was trying to find its way through a tangle of vines. For a second it was caught in the tangle. Only for a second. The ball turned milky white. The smoking vines fell away from it.

It had burned its way through the tangle.

King saw it come toward him.

He ducked around a tree, dived un-

der the low boughs of an overhanging evergreen shrub, got down on his hands and knees and crawled like a fool.

Somewhere overhead Avena screamed in disappointment. He lay still, panting, listening. He could not hear the ball. It was moving silently through the tangle seeking him. He moved cautiously forward.

The main part of his task had been accomplished. He had drawn Avena after him, had drawn her away from the others. They were safe by now. Leda, her father, Carson, Rogers, safe. Somehow a glow shot through him when he thought of Leda. She was safe. That was very important.

There remained the job of saving his own neck.

"Those who take the tiger by the tail cannot easily let go," he thought.

CRAWLING under the limbs that were too low to let him stand upright, he slid forward. Just ahead, a rocky ledge rose up, barring further passage in that direction. He moved along the base of the cliff, keeping out of sight. Once, through an opening, he caught a glimpse of Avena in her bubble. She was behind and to the right, looking in his direction. The ball he could not see.

An open space lay ahead of him. He surveyed the surroundings, made certain he was not seen, dashed across the opening.

Brr-brr-brr, right behind him, like a mad hornet.

Avena screamed in delight.

King sprinted. Avena had known where he was hidden. She had kept the ball hidden, had waited for him to show himself, had pretended not to know where he was. He had fallen for the trap.

Brrrr!

The ball was so close he could almost

feel it. Ahead, ten yards away, the growth of trees began again. King ran at full height, looking back, casting quick glances over his shoulder. The ball darted at him. He flung himself flat. It ducked down toward him, hit the ground ahead of him, bounced. He kicked at it, felt a jolt of searing pain, leaped among the trees. The ball gyrated upward out of control.

Out of control!

His kick had damaged it.

Brrrrrr!

It spun in a circle, dived down between the trees, following the path he had taken. It was under perfect control again.

King, ignoring the pain in his foot, ran. A halfback in a broken field, a halfback dodging tacklers, never displayed more agility than he did. Diving through shrubbery, ducking around trees, getting down and crawling, he ran as he had never ran before. And—he lost the ball. Slipping forward, he kept completely out of sight.

Ahead, the cliff turned. He stared at it, frowning. Caught in a corner, he would either have to retrace his steps or go far to the right. He chose to go to the right, stopped.

The glass bubble of Avena was over the trees to the right, blocking his escape. He would have to go back.

Behind him, in the direction from which he had come, he saw the ball. Moving in complete silence, it was hunting stealthily through the undergrowth for him.

He was trapped.

He considered his chances, made his choice. He crawled under a heavy growth of shrubbery to hide. As long as he lay still, Avena would have a hard time spotting him. Meanwhile night was not far off. If he could remain hidden until darkness—A movement in his hiding place held his eyes.

He gasped in startled disbelief.

It was Leda who had moved. She had fled in this direction too. All unknowingly, King had followed her, had lured Avena to her hiding place.

Both of them were trapped.

"WHERE did you come from?" King whispered.

"Sh! Don't make a sound!"

He was silent. Quietly he adjusted the foliage to cover him, lay without moving. Overhead the bubble of Avena floated. Whether or not Avena knew that Leda was also trapped here in this elbow of the cliff, he did not know, but certainly the huntress knew that he was here. He could see her watching the ground below like a hawk waiting to pounce. Now and again he caught glimpses of the ball questing through the foliage. It no longer made the hrring sound but moved in absolute silence. Using it, Avena could search every nook in the corner of the cliffs. She could pry into every hole, look under every leaf if she wanted to.

King watched the sun. In half an hour the quick darkness of Akkan would fall. Could they remain hidden an half hour?

The ball passed directly over them. He held his breath. It hesitated, then drifted on. He followed it with his eyes, watching it through breaks in the foliage. It was near the cliffs now, searching along the base of the bluffs. Suddenly it turned, started straight toward them.

He tensed.

It passed directly over them. Without hesitating, it went straight to the glass bubble. The ship rose above the trees, moved off toward the city of the Akkar.

Avena had called off her dog, had given up the hunt for this day, had gone home. King watched the bubble

disappear in the sky, got slowly to his feet, wiped sweat from his face.

"That was a close call," he said.

Leda rose, stumhled, clung to him for support. He saw she was shaking, her face an ashy white.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. I'm—scared. That's all. Just scared."

"Poor kid." He patted her arm. No wonder she had been scared. Even better than he, she knew the meaning of the hunting of Avena.

"I'll take you hack to the others," he said. "Then I'll go on into the city tonight."

MOVING slowly through the trees, they started to retrace their steps. A shadow moved swiftly along the ground. King looked up. Avena in her glass hubble was coming out of the sun toward them.

The huntress had tricked them. She had pretended to leave hut instead of quitting the hunt, she had gone in a huge circle and had returned to the elbow in the cliffs, guessing that her prey would reveal itself when she seemed to leave.

She had guessed right. Her prey had revealed itself.

"Damn her!"

King shoved Leda down out of sight into the tangle. For a split second, he thought of trying to hide too. Then he decided on another course of action, for two reasons. One reason lay in the fact that he really didn't have time to hide. The other reason lay in his memory of the way Akhad, and Avena, had acted on different occasions. When he had surrendered to Akhad, Akhad had seemed to regret his action. Akhad had wanted him to run, had expected him to run. When he hadn't run, Akhad hadn't known quite what to do.

When Avena had caught them in the

glade, and he had faced her for a moment, she had seemed surprised.

King stepped boldly into the open. Avena saw him. The sphere leaped almost straight up as she brought it to a halt. Out from it the white hall darted. Straighter than any arrow in flight, it dived straight toward King.

He did not move. Hands on hips, he watched it come, waiting its charge. The split second the hall took to reach him seemed to stretch into a century. In that second, he grew years older. Every nerve in his brain yelled at him to run, every muscle screamed for release of the terrible tension huilt up in it.

He stood rooted to the ground.

Brrrrr!

Six inches from his chest the hall huzzed angrily. It spun upward in a tight arc. Like a dog charging on a leash and suddenly pulled back, it was jerked away from it. It seemed to turn somersaults in the air over his head.

King ignored it. He watched the glass hubble. Avena, surprise on her lovely face, was leaning over and watching him.

"Well?" he said.

SILENCE, broken by the angry hrrring of the hall.

"Well!" The hard toughness of tempered steel rang in his voice. He had no thought that Avena could understand him hut perhaps she would grasp the meaning of the tone. The hall, he knew, would transmit the vibrations of his voice to her.

"What—what sort of creature are you?" Avena whispered, through the ball. The words, or the impulses entering his mind, were in English. He had no time to be concerned with the miracle that brought her words to him in an understandable tongue. He

could talk to her and she to him.* How that was done Rogers could explain later. If there was a later!

"Look in your trophy room!" he answered. "Your trophies should tell you what kind of a creature I am."

"I'm not talking about that."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well—You came out into the open."

"Are you surprised to have your game talk to you, to have it face you rather than run from you?"

"All the others ran." There was something here that she couldn't understand. The others had run. He hadn't run. This puzzled her.

King heard the puzzled note in her voice. He dared to breathe.

"Didn't it occur to you that sooner or later you would meet someone who wouldn't run?"

"N—o. I thought—"

"You thought that humans were created to run for you." Hot anger boiled in his voice. "When one of them doesn't run, you're so damned surprised you don't know what to do with yourself!"

"This—this is no way to speak to the Princess of Akkan!" She was angry too, mad clean through.

"As to that, I wouldn't know," King said. "I never met a princess before, so naturally I don't know how to talk to one. But from what I've seen of the princess I have met, it's all right with me if I never meet another one."

"You—you dare—"

The ball brrred.

"I dare anything. I've been in battle, lady. In battle men get so mad and so tired that they don't give a damn what happens. I'm mad now, and tired too, if you want the whole truth, and I don't give two hoots in Georgia what happens next."

What he said was part truth. He was angry and tired and largely he didn't give a damn. But his actions resulted from more than anger. There was cold calculation in them. The Akkar prized bravery. If they prized it enough, he might, just possibly might, remain alive. He had no choice. If he played his cards right, Avena might—do anything. If he played them just a little wrong, if he made her too angry, she might—well, there was the ball circling over his head.

"Do your damndest, Princess of Akkan."

"Oh! You fool! You hopeless fool!"

"Am I?"

"Have you no fear of death?"

"Lady, by rights I should have been dead long ago. I'm living on borrowed time. So, if you knock me over, it won't make any difference."

A VENA had brought the bubble lower. He could see her clearly now, the anger in her face, in the hot sparkle of her eyes. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Why do you stare at me like that?" she demanded.

He told her. "All my life I've carried a dream of you in my heart," he answered. "Now, I've seen you."

"A dream of me? But that's not possible. You never saw me before."

"So I never saw you before? So what? I've dreamed of you just the same."

"And now that you have met me?"

King was silent. His face showed his thoughts.

Thought radiation flowed through the ball from the mind of the person controlling it to the mind of anyone in the immediate vicinity. These thought impulses were interpreted in terms of known language. Actually a form of telepathy through the medium of the ball was involved in all conversation between the humans and the Akkar. Thus the thought impulses came from Avena's mind to King's mind. His brain translated them into English. When he spoke to her, the reverse of this process took place.—Ed.

"So I am not as beautiful as you had dreamed?"

"If anything, you are more beautiful. It's—it's just that I hate a coward—"

"A coward? Surely you do not think of me as a coward?"

King took a deep breath, and plunged. "How else can I think of you? From the safety of an airship the like of which I've never seen before you come hunting creatures who have no way to defend themselves. You stay up there where you're safe and sound, and you send that thing—" He gestured up toward the whirling ball. "—to hunt us down. You don't take any risks of any kind whatever. If that isn't cowardice, I don't know cowardice when I see it."

"Oh!" She was angrier now than ever, so angry that for a second he thought she was going to launch the ball at him. "The Akkar have always hunted this way. It is considered a very brave thing to come here into the forests and hunt the wild beasts that Akhad sends here. The Akkar are the bravest of all people—"

"Who says so?"

"Who says so! Why—Why—"

"The Akkar!" King said bitingly. "Who else would say so but the Akkar? If you want the opinion of anyone else, ask the trophies in your game room what they think. Ask me!"

SURPRISE showed again on her lovely face. And perplexed thought. Living in Akkan, an Akkar, she had never thought that another race might have a different opinion of the bravery of the Akkar. She had never met a member of another race. Killed them, yes, but talk to them, no. Now she was talking to one and she was finding it perturbing.

"But we are brave"

"Prove it!"

"Prove it? How?"

"Go back to your city and find the biggest strongest, bravest Akkar of your race. Bring him back here and drop him down on the ground and let him face me unarmed. Then we shall see who is brave. Meet me with no weapons. Bring your champion, your greatest hunter—"

"That would be Lardon. But he wouldn't come. And if he did come—"

"He would sit up there in an airship and send a ball down after me," King grated. "He would be afraid to meet me face to face."

He had her going! She didn't know what to say. Her anger was gone. It had been replaced by perplexity. And, most important of all, she was no longer thinking of him in terms of another trophy to ornament her game room.

"Lardon wouldn't come," she repeated.

"Of course he wouldn't come. I knew he wouldn't. I've never seen him, but he is an Akkar, and all Akkar are cowards."

"All?"

"Every last damned one of you!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"We'll see about that!" As she spoke, she was working the controls of the airship. King's thought was that she was going to leave. He expected to see the bubble rise above the trees, head back toward Akka. It didn't rise. It dropped swiftly to the ground, crunched through the shrubbery, came to a halt. Opening the door, Avena leaped out, came toward King.

"You said no Akkar would dare to meet you face to face, unarmed. Well, I'm meeting you. Now let's see what you are going to do."

"Well, I'll be forever damned!" King gasped. "No, don't do that!" Her hard little fists were beating at him. He

pushed them away.

"I'll show you!" she panted. "You said we were cowards. I'll show you. Release my hands!" She was furiously angry. King held her easily and pretended not to notice the ball brring overhead. She was not wearing a finger ring to control the ball but he suspected the single gleaming jewel on the chain around her neck served the same purpose. Did he dare grab the chain, snap it? Without the ball, she would really be helpless.

"Turn me loose!" she demanded.

KING released her. She drew herself up to full height. "All right, brave man, I'm here. Why don't you do something?"

King shrugged, glanced up at the ball. "With that thing up there, you ask me to do something!"

"It won't harm you."

King laughed.

"So you are afraid of it, are you? All right, I'll send it away."

Silently obeying her unspoken command, the ball slid through the open door in the glass bubble, came to rest on the floor.

"Now, it's gone. I'm powerless to defend myself."

"Scarcely that, Avena."

She spread her hands, to show they were empty. "But I have no weapon. See for yourself. I am meeting you on equal terms."

Was she trying to kid him? The ball might be in the glass bubble but at her mental command, it would leap into action in something less than seconds. He shook his head.

"Coward!" she challenged.

"Even if you were weaponless, I wouldn't fight you," he answered.

"Why not?"

"You're a woman."

"What difference does that make?"

"What difference! In your world is it a custom for men to fight women?"

"Certainly. Isn't it the same in the world you came from?"

"I should say it isn't," King answered. "Men do not fight against women. It wouldn't be a fair fight. No, Avena, I won't fight you, not even if you removed the necklace from around your throat and threw it away."

"What?"

"Why this nonsensical farce?" King demanded. "You're pretending to be unarmed. What kind of a fool do you think I am? If you're so determined to meet me on equal terms, why don't you take that necklace off and throw it away?"

"How do you know about this necklace?"

"How—Why—." King suddenly shut up. He could have torn his tongue out. He had said too much! There was no way he could have known the ball was controlled through the necklace.

"For that matter, how do you happen to know my name? Twice, you have called me Avena. How did you learn my name?"

HER voice was challenging, suspicion filled, and shot through with sudden overtones of fear.

"I—you told me your name," King lied hastily.

"I did not. And I certainly did not tell you anything about the necklace. Where did you learn these things?"

Too late, King realized he had made a fatal error. As long as she thought of him as something a little more intelligent than a beast, he had a chance. Now she knew he knew too much, he knew more than he had any right to know. Her eyes narrowed to slits, were fixed on him.

Brr! Out from its resting place in

the bubble the ball shot. It whirled overhead.

Ice cold water flowed through King's veins. He had blundered, and she had caught him.

"Well?" she challenged.

He shrugged, spread his hands. "Wouldn't you like to know!" he answered.

"Tell me, or—" She pointed upward toward the ball.

"Go to hell!"

Probably she did not know what hell meant but the tone must have revealed his meaning. Her face flushed. For a second, he thought she was going to launch the ball at him.

Instead she pointed toward the glass airship. "In there!" she ordered.

"In there?"

"Yes. Instantly."

She sounded like a tough top sergeant. Silently King obeyed.

The glass bubble lifted over the forest, moved swiftly toward the city of A' a. Avena, busy at the controls, did nothing. In equal silence King watched their approach to the city.

"Well, I started to this town," he thought. "But I certainly didn't expect to arrive this way."

Somewhere down in that city slipping away into ruin was an armory which he had to find, if he remained alive long enough. If he could manage to stay alive, he would have an excellent chance of finding the armory. And Carson, Rogers, probably Leda, would come looking for him. Leda would tell them what had happened. Carson would be sure to come.

"Why are you looking so grim?" Avena suddenly questioned.

"Was I?" King grunted. Then he grinned. "Sorry. I guess I'm not my usual cheerful self today."

Somberly she studied him. Then she smiled. "You're a strange person,"

she said. "But I like you."

"I was afraid of that," King answered.

VIII

ENTERING the city, the first place they stopped was the armory King was seeking!

Avena sent the glass bubble down in a long slant, down and into a long building that looked like, and was, a hangar. Made of stone, slate-roofed, it was badly in need of repair. Inside were great numbers of the strange airships. Some were obviously hangar queens, being stripped for their parts, others were being repaired, still others were ready for use. The hangar was filled with workmen, most of them old, all of them slow moving. Lackadaisically, one came forward when Avena grounded her ship. Ducking his head in what was apparently intended to be a gesture of obeisance, he stood aside while they got out of the ship. Then he entered it, moved it off to a line of others, began to inspect it.

"Come with me," Avena said.

The billiard ball had followed her out of the ship. As they walked toward a door in the far corner of the vast hangar, it floated over their heads. King noticed that it seemed to move sluggishly. Avena rapped on the door. It was opened for her and they entered. King took one look around. His eyes narrowed.

This was the armory! There was no question about it. They had entered a long, low-ceilinged room. Down both sides were work benches, dozens of them, hundreds. Running behind the benches was a series of cables with power-takeoffs coming down to each bench. Somehow or other it reminded him of a large storage-battery charging station, except that the equipment on

the benches had never been designed to put power into any storage battery he had ever heard of. Besides, the benches did not hold batteries. They held the glowing balls, the deadly billiard balls of the Akkan. Each ball rested in a specially designed niche. Complicated machinery seemed to feed current to them.

The armory seemed to be short of man-power. Not over twenty-five or thirty of the benches had attendants. The benches at the far end of the long room seemed not to have been used for years.

An attendant, apparently the person in charge, came hobbling up to them. He was old and stooped. Button-black eyes peered out at them from wrinkled cheeks the color of shoe leather. He ducked his head to Avena.

"The *chad* needs recharging," she said. "Give me a fresh one."

"Yes, Princess. The Princess—" The shoe-button eyes darted toward King. "—The Princess is going to play a game?"

"That is none of your affair, Kathor!" Avena snapped. "Here, take this. And in the future, mind your own business." As she spoke, she was removing the necklace and its pendent jewel from around her neck. King realized that her voice was growing weaker and weaker. Kathor took the jewel, bobbed off, the ball floating behind him. Apparently at his direction, the ball slid into a niche on the nearest bench. He laid the necklace down, picked up another, came bobbing back to Avena. She slipped the necklace around her neck. Up from the bench a ball darted. Dancing and darting, it gyrated in circles, took up a position directly above King's head.

KING watched the whole performance with appraising eyes. "Hm,"

he said. "*Chad*, I gather, is your name for that thing." He nodded toward the ball.

"Yes," Avena answered. Her voice was strong and firm in his mind now, with no trace of weakness in it. "The *chad* are dependent upon stored energy. When all their current is used, we bring them here for recharging."

"Interesting. Very interesting. Who invented the *chad* and how does it work?"

"It was invented long ago," Avena answered. "As to how it works, I don't know." She shrugged. How the *chad* worked was of no interest to her. She didn't even know the name of the Akkar who had invented it. "Come with me," she said.

King followed her. "Sorenson was right," he thought. "The Akkar at one time made tremendous scientific advances. Then they stopped advancing. Now they're going back. She doesn't even know who invented that thing, and doesn't care."

In America every schoolboy knew the names of the men who built the first airplane, who designed the telephone, who invented the radio. In America these things were important. In Akkan, nobody cared. Or nobody except a group of trapped and desperate Yanks, hidden in a cave inside a mountain. They cared how the *chad* worked. They cared plenty.

Avena led King through the city. What had been dimly visible from the height overlooking Akka, the disintegration, the slow crumbling into ruin, was readily apparent here. The streets had not been cleaned for years. They were littered with smelly debris. A few Akkar were visible, picking their way along. Unlike Avena they were not protected by the *chad*. The sun, low on the horizon, was throwing long shadows across the town. The Akkar

seemed to be hurrying to get out of sight before darkness fell but the ones they met stopped long enough to stare at King in undisguised amazement.

"I seem to astonish your fellow citizens," he observed.

"They are not citizens," she answered. "They are workers, free slaves. Only hunters can be citizens."

"Ah. Hunting, I take it, is the most important activity of your race."

"Of course." Surprise was in her voice. "What else could be important?"

"Well, I could think of some things," King muttered. "Like cleaning up these streets and repairing the buildings, but no matter. It's your world; run it as you please."

She looked startled. "Are you daring to criticize the Akkar?"

"Nothing like that," King answered. "Merely a suggestion." He didn't want to set off her hair-trigger temper again, or not until he had discovered where she was taking him.

HE soon got the answer to that question. Avena led him into what had once been a palace. Constructed along the same lines as Akbad's temple in Burma, it was composed of scores of buildings, all roughly grouped together to form a single structure. Avena entered the central hall. Here forty or fifty Akkar were seated around a long banquet table. Unlike the Akkar they had seen on the streets, each one around the table had a *chad* floating over him. When Avena entered the room, they greeted her with shouts of joy.

"Ho, Avena, back from the hunt?"

"What luck, Princess?"

"Did you get another head for your trophy room?"

Then they saw King. There was instant silence. The deadly billiard balls

floating in the air seemed to tense themselves. They had been floating easily, like tiny captive balloons on a windless day. Now, as soon as King entered the chamber, they began their terrible dance.

The silence was broken by a voice.

"What is *that*?"

"Where did it come from?" a second voice asked.

"What's it doing here?"

Avena, without answering, had seated herself at the head of the table. She clapped her hands. Slaves came running, bearing water, food, wine, which they sat before her. Ravenously she began to eat. King swallowed. Hunger was a gnawing knot in his stomach. Thirst had dried his throat. It seemed to him that he would give his life for a glass of that cool, sparkling water that Avena was drinking. The Akkar staring at him in dumfounded amazement, he ignored.

"It's a man!" one of them whispered in awe-struck tones.

"It's human!" another said.

There was disgust in the voices, and unconcealed hostility. Avena ate on.

"Why does Avena bring that in here?" The questioner was a bull-necked, beefy individual seated at Avena's right.

"Am I answerable to you, Lardon?" Avena asked.

"No. Of course not. But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing," Lardon answered. His face reddened, veins pulsing in his forehead. He glared venomously at King as if the latter had caused his trouble with Avena.

"I chose to bring him here," Avena stated.

"But he's dirty," one of them protested.

"And he smells bad," a second added.

KING cleared his throat. Enough was enough. "I grant you I probably smell bad," he said. "I'm dirty and I'm also hungry and thirsty. But so far as the dirt and the smell goes, I don't see anybody in this joint who wouldn't be improved by a good GI scrubbing."

He wasn't sure they would understand him. He was sure enough of the operation of the *chad* to know whether his meaning would reach them. If they did understand him; and didn't like what he said, they could darned well lump it.

They understood him all right. Their faces showed it. Lardon started to get to his feet. "Of all the insolence—" he began.

"Sit down," Avena said.

Grumbling Lardon slid back into his chair. Avena pointed her thumb toward King, spoke between bites. "He said Akka smells bad. He said all of us ought to work on the streets until we got them cleaned up."

Amazed incredulous silence held the group. To them, King belonged to an inferior species, to a type of animal that was good enough for purposes of the hunt but which could not be mentioned on the same breath with an Akkar. And this ragged, dirty, jungle beast was daring to criticize them! A growl ran around the group. Avena continued eating.

"He also said," she spoke again, "that the Akkar are cowards."

This really produced a buzz.

"Damn his eyes!"

"I'll have his heart's blood for this."

"He'll adorn my trophy room before another sun has set."

"Let me have him."

"No. Let me!"

A dozen of the *chad* were diving toward King at the same instant.

"Stop it!" Avena's voice rang out.

The balls were so close King could feel the heat from them as they were pulled away.

Questioning eyes turned toward the girl.

"He said the Akkar were cowards because we refused to meet him empty-handed. He said killing him with the *chad* is no proof of our bravery. He said the only way we could prove our bravery to him would be to meet him on equal terms, either by giving him a *chad*, or a knife, or giving him any weapon we chose just so we had the *same* weapon! Was that what you said, man?" She was speaking to King now.

FOR a split second King hesitated, wishing he had that white throat between his fingers. Damn her! She had certainly turned the tables on him. But the deed was done and there was nothing to do except go through with it.

"That's what I said," he answered. "The Akkar boast of their bravery, citing their hunting exploits as proof. The Akkar think, because they go out and hunt us down, that they are proving themselves to be the bravest of all people. Instead they are proving themselves to be the biggest of cowards. If you want to show how brave you are, meet me on equal terms."

Open-mouthed, the diners stared at him. His words had certainly given them a new slant on themselves, a slant they speedily discovered they did not like.

Lardon, his face red with rage, turned to Avena. "Princess, let me destroy this—this—"

"Certainly, Lardon," Avena cooed. "I also think his insolence is unbearable. Destroy him."

Lardon leaped to his feet. The glitter in his eyes was almost maniacal. Over him, his *chad* darted toward King.

The Yank took one step forward. His left fist lashed out. It connected solidly with Lardon's jaw just in front of the ear. The Akkar turned a half-flip backward, hit the floor, clawed like a cat as he tried to get to his feet. Momentarily he lost control of the deadly ball darting toward King. It lost momentum, drifted aimlessly. King turned to Avena.

"Enough of this," he said abruptly. "Kill me and have it done with. I've had enough of this torture."

She was staring at him in open-mouthed admiration. "I didn't mean —" she started to say, then abruptly broke off. "Lardon! Stop it this instant. If you strike him from behind with the *chad* I'll have your head off your shoulders within an hour. Stop it."

King turned just in time to see the deadly ball pull away from him.

"But you said to destroy him," Lardon argued.

"I meant to meet him on equal terms and destroy him, *if you could!*" the girl answered.

"Meet him on equal terms—"

The princess nodded.

"But that is an impossibility. I am a hunter of Akkan. I would not dirty my hands with such trash as this."

"No?"

"No!"

"Then I think he is right, that you, at least, of the Akkar, are a coward."

IN that moment King knew, through no fault of his own, he had made a deadly enemy. Rather Avena had made an enemy for him. If he never did anything else, Lardon would kill him now. Probably the Akkar would not meet him in a fair fight—the mottled color on his cheeks showed he was afraid of that—but he would certainly make every effort to kill the in-

truder. King was suddenly angry, at Avena, for forcing such an issue. Why was she torturing him? If she wanted him killed, why didn't she order it done, and get it over with? She was speaking again, to him now.

"I believe you said you were hungry. Forgive me for neglecting you. It is our law that all guests shall be fed. Here. Catch!"

From the plate in front of her she selected a morsel of meat, flung it at him. If he had been a hungry dog, she would have used the same gesture. There was contempt in the act and in her eyes was mockery.

The anger burning in King boiled over. He caught the meat, with all his strength flung it back into her face.

For a split second there was dreadful silence in the room. The hottest rage he had ever seen burned in her eyes. Then the rage faded. Wonder replaced it. And something of awe. For a moment her eyes were the eyes of a little girl, of a miss eight years of age, of a little girl looking adoringly at someone she loved more than anything else in the world. The wonder remained in her eyes. Silence held the room. With one hand she wiped her face clean.

"You know," she said slowly, "I am rather proud of you. When I found you out there in the forest I thought you were a bag of wind, a boaster, a braggart. Now I know I was wrong, that I misjudged you."

The wonder remained in her eyes. "Yes, I am proud of you. And I think you were right about the Akkar, although I had never thought of them as being cowards. I also think you have something the Akkar need, and need badly."

"What do mean?" King whispered. He did not dare to trust himself to raise his voice above a whisper.

She smiled. The lights deepened in her eyes. "That will come later."

She clapped her hands. To the frightened slaves who came running, she said. "Conduct this man to the best chamber in the palace. Bathe him, provide clothing for him. Set the best food, the best wine, before him. Anything he wants he is to have, but he is not to leave the palace. Move!"

Slaves tugging at his arms, King found himself led across the room. Silence held the banquet table. Glittering eyes watched him go. Some of the Akkar were looking speculatively at Avena. The others, and Lardon was foremost among them, were glaring at him. His mind in turmoil, King let himself be led away.

LATE that night Avena came to his rooms. Except for Kathor, the aged workman from the laboratory where the *chod* were charged, she was alone. They entered his room furtively, and King, seeing them, wondered at her choice of a companion.

"What do you want?" King questioned.

"We came to talk," Avena answered. Soft lights illumined the room dimly. King was struck by the change in the girl's manner. Before, she had been haughty, imperious, a queen by divine right, a huntress by centuries of tradition, a ruler, mistress of herself and of her people, one who knew her word was law. Somehow she had changed. The haughtiness had gone. She was almost humble now.

"First, let me admit I tested you," she said.

"Tested me?" King echoed.

"Yes. When I brought you into the presence of my nobles, I deliberately forced you into a dangerous situation, where you would have to prove yourself. Frankly, if you had shown your-

self unworthy, if you had turned coward, if you had not lived up to your words, well, Lardon could have worked his will with you." For an instant, ringing steel was in the tones of her voice, revealing depths of character King had not suspected. Huntress she was, cruel and wanton killer, but weakling never.

"Even the way I tossed the food at you was part of the testing," she continued. Wonder and something of awe came into her eyes again. "Yes, I was proud of the way you met the test."

"Thank you," King said. Strong emotions pulsed through him. He sternly suppressed them. Better wait, better see, better find out what she wants. "You said something about some questions?"

"Yes. I—we—want to know—" she hesitated. A silent, inscrutable witness, Kathor, the ancient technician, stood and watched.

"About what?" King invited.

"About—the land beyond!"

"What?"

"The world beyond."

King stared at her.

"The princess means the world from which you came," Kathor interposed. The old man's voice was deep with bass bell tones. "We want to know about that."

"Oh."

"We want to know about its customs, how the people live, what they eat and do they always have enough to eat, how they are governed and what kind of kings they have, and—" Avena ran out of breath.

"We want to know about your sciences," Kathor continued. "We want to know the location of your world, the natural laws that govern there. We want to know about your physics, the chemistry of your world, about the—" But King's mind refused the term.

Kathor was referring to something that existed or was known in Akkan but which either did not exist or was not known on earth.

"**W**HEW!" King whistled. "You certainly do want to know something." He studied Kathor, seeking the motive that lay back of the question. The old technician met his gaze squarely. King looked at Avena. She was eagerly watching him.

"Will you tell us?" she questioned.

"Why do you want to know?" he asked.

"That is none—" For a second her old imperious manner returned and she was again a ruler putting a subject into his place. Instantly she caught herself. Her tone changed. "We want to know and we have reasons for wanting to know. Isn't that enough?"

King grinned. "I guess it is," he answered. His reservations he kept to himself. Some things he would tell them. There was much he would keep to himself, until he knew the reasons they had for seeking the information. He began to talk.

He told them about Earth, the green planet that to him was lost in some vast immensity across or beyond a gulf that he did not begin to understand. Earth of the blue skies and the gray-green seas, of clouds and rain and sunsets and rainbows, of mountains and deserts, of polar ice caps and steaming tropic jungles. He had seen them all and he talked well. Kathor listened with almost torrid interest, a youthful light suddenly alive in his old eyes. "I didn't know—I couldn't guess—Imagine!" was all he could say.

"But the people," Avena interrupted. "I want to know about the people. Talk about them."

King talked about men, about Arabs and Chinese, Germans and Japs, the

English and the Norse, and the amazing Russians who groped toward something without knowing exactly what it was except that it was somehow colossal. He talked about the French and the Spanish and the Italians and the Negroes, about all the peoples on earth, except one. Avena listened avidly now, Kathor with slightly less concentration.

"Tell us about your own people," Avena ordered.

King sighed. "I am an American," he said and he wondered what that meant. For America had taken all the races of earth, all of them, had blended them together, and out of that blending had come no one knew exactly what except that it too, was somehow colossal. King tried to tell them about this.

"Who is your king?" Avena questioned.

"We have no king," he answered, surprised.

"No king!" Now Avena was surprised. So he had to explain that. When he had finished she seemed to understand, but he doubted if she really did understand. No one who was not an American ever really understood. You had to be born in a land, to live in, to sweat, suffer, and work in it, before you really understood. Avena listened. And Kathor began to ask questions.

Kathor wanted to know about science. King answered, but now he dealt in half-truths, in evasions, in answers that were not clear. Kathor was not satisfied. Again and again he insisted that King explain more clearly. He did not get what he wanted. To explain too much was not wise, until King knew why the information was wanted. He did not know that. Nor were they willing to tell him.

Suddenly the light in the windows revealed he had talked all night. Kathor and Avena left as furtively as they

had entered.

"But we will return," Avena assured him. "We want to know more." What was going on in that sleek head, King wondered.

THE next night they came again. And talked. The next night it was the same. Never did they reveal the purpose moving in the back of their minds. Each night they came and asked questions. Each day King discovered he was a prisoner. Everything he wanted he received; food, the best of care. But the door of the room was always locked and always the obsequious slaves who served him kept wary watch over him.

Then, just before noon, Kathor came for him. And he discovered what had been in their minds all the time. There was a glittering light in the eyes of the old technician when he entered the room.

"It's a great day for Akkan," he said. "Come. There are things for you to see."

Wondering, King followed him. Kathor led the American to what had once been a vast, open-air amphitheater capable of seating forty to fifty thousand people. It, like everything else in Akkan, was half in ruins but the central stage was still usable and the stone seats in the great halfbowl were still in place. There was something missing, however, and King saw at a glance what it was: the throng that once had filled this bowl, the horde that it had been built to accommodate. The people. They were missing. A scattering of Akkan were present, enough to fill the lower tiers, thousands where once there had been tens of thousands.

In the center of the stage, in a massive throne chair with a canopy over it to protect her from the rays of the sun, Avena was seated.

Below her, in a semicircle between her and the crowd, were her nobles, the hunting caste of Akkan, each with a *chad* floating over his head. The people in the stand had no *chad*. Only Avena and her hunters wore the deadly little floating balls.

"What is going on?" King questioned.

"This is the beginning of the Festival of the Laws," Kathor answered. "On this day the ruler of Akkan, now the Princess Avena, appears before her people, and announces the laws for the coming year."

"Um. You mean Avena makes all the laws of this country?"

"Naturally. I understand you do it differently in your country but we have done it this way in Akkan for centuries past the counting."

"Do the people obey her?"

"Certainly. Her word is law."

"Well I'm damned!" King said.

UNOBTRUSIVELY Kathor took him down among the crowd, sat down with him. King suddenly noticed that the aged technician was trembling. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Shh! Wait. Watch."

The festival commenced. It started with all the trumpery and display of a barbaric people, with the fanfare of trumpets, the weird wailing of musical instruments unknown to the American. A procession of pages brought in a gold mace that was apparently the symbol of the power of the ruler. Avena accepted it. The trumpets blew again. Avena rose from her chair, extended the mace.

"The law controlling the rights of the people to life is extended for another year." Her clear voice carried over the whole assembly. The trumpets blew again.

"The law governing the rate of taxa-

tion is extended for another year, the rate remaining the same." Again her clear voice rang out. Again the trumpets blew.

Marveling at the customs of this strange people, King listened. The laws meant little to him but they seemed to mean a great deal to the assembled Akkar. They were listening attentively. Several times King saw some of them glancing around as though they were looking for someone. Every time their gaze seemed to seek out Kathor. The aged technician appeared not to notice. King sensed a tension growing in the crowd. Most of them were waiting to hear the voicing of the laws but some of them were waiting for—something else. For a period that seemed to be hours in length Avena announced the laws of Akkan. King could not see why this was important. These laws had been in force for centuries. She was merely continuing them in force. What was there to get excited about?

Some of the Akkar were getting excited.

Avena suddenly stopped speaking. Her gaze went over the assemblage as if she was trying to locate someone. Her eyes centered on King. She looked straight at him, as if she sought courage to continue. Then she smiled. Her firm voice rang out again.

"I have now come to the place where it is customary in the voicing of the laws to announce the law of the hunting of the nobles of Akkar."

A STIR ran through the assembly. This was not in the ritual. This was not in the script.

"I am ready to announce that law. *From this day forth the nobles of Akkan will cease from hunting, they will give up the beastly and degrading amusement which has done so much to bring this land and these, my people,*

to their present low state of civilization. My nobles will cease from hunting. There will be no hunting in Akkan, no hunting of any kind. My nobles, instead of hunting, will supervise the cleaning and restoring of this city to its former condition. They will encourage the lagging industries, they will aid and abet the faltering sciences, they will do everything in their power to make certain that Akkan and the Akkar resume their interrupted march onward and upward to the future."

Hot silence filled the huge bowl.

"I have spoken," Avena ended. She returned to her throne, sat looking out over the throng, waiting tensely.

Her word was law. She had ordered the end of the hunting in Akkan. In effect, she had destroyed the most cherished privilege of the upper classes. She had decreed what was nothing less than a revolution.

King's heart leaped up into his mouth as he listened to her words. This, this was what she and Kathor had been planning. This was what they had had in mind when they had questioned him. Revolution! They had wanted to know about Earth and the customs of its peoples so they could bring about reform in Akkan.

The hot silence was broken by a sound. King, on his feet, madly cheering.

"At a girl, Avena! That's the best damned law that ever was passed in the whole history of this country!"

Heads turned in his direction. Kathor abruptly jerked him back to his seat.

"Shut up and wait!" the old technician hissed.

"Wait for what?"

"There is—Ah—"

Down in the semicircle surrounding the raised stage on which Avena's throne was placed a noble was getting

slowly to his feet.

"I cry protest!" he shouted.

ALL the nobles came to their feet, Lardon among them. Lardon was pointing at King.

"That man, that foreigner," he yelled, "has led the princess away from the tried and tested customs and laws of our fathers. He has bewitched her, has encouraged her to try to set aside our most precious possession. I cry protest against the voicing of the law and I cry protest against that man." He pointed at King.

A dozen voices were instantly crying protest. There was a babble of sound. It lasted for an instant. The commoners, the workers, the technicians, sitting in the vast bowl, looked in confusion at each other. They did not know what was going on. A law and a custom of centuries had been changed. That they, the common people, would get large benefits from this change had not yet occurred to them. They hadn't had time to think, yet. The nobles, led by Lardon, had either been forewarned of the changing of the law, or they thought faster. They knew what to do.

A *chad* was launched straight toward King.

A dozen of the deadly balls leaped toward Avena.

More of the *chad* whirled angrily over the nobles who controlled them but were not launched at the princess or at King. Either they were being held in reserve or the hunters who controlled them had not yet made up their minds what to do.

A shocked gasp went up from the assembled Akkar! Avena had changed the laws. The nobles had promptly rebelled. Seconds after the law had been made, they were destroying their ruler.

King came to his feet. He leaped

down the tiers of seats, trying to reach the nobles. He had only seconds to live. If he could dodge the *chad*, reach Avena — "Damned foolishness!" he grunted. He didn't have a chance.

The balls were driving straight toward Avena. She did not move.

Ten feet away from her, ten feet away from King, the *chad* stopped in midair. They hung there, not moving. An instant before, they had been driving toward their target as fast as so many arrows. Now they were stopped, hanging motionless in the air.

A mocking smile was on Avena's face.

"Well," she spoke.

The nobles stared in consternation from her to the *chad*. Some of them fumbled with the jewels that controlled the deadly little balls.

"Well!" Avena spoke again. Now the ring of steel was in her voice.

Silence. The multitude stared.

"Who cries protest of my laws?" Avena demanded.

Not a voice answered.

"Then obey the laws that I have decreed. Now, out of my presence, all of you!"

LIKE a breaking mill dam pouring out its waters in flood, the assembled Akkar ran from the bowl. Like mountain goats, some scrambled up the tiers, others scuttled out the side entrances. The nobles ran with the rest, seemed glad of the chance to run. Oddly their *chad* followed them now.

King stared in amazement at the spectacle.

Somewhere near him a voice chuckled. It was Kathor. "You!" King whispered.

The aged technician nodded. "We knew they would protest. We knew they would rebel."

"But—"

"Their *chad* failed to obey them? Naturally. You see, I, and the workers under me, repair and tune the *chad*. We simply changed the tuning so that all of the balls, without the knowledge of their users, were under the control of Avena. Thus when the nobles tried to attack her, and you, she simply stopped the flight of the *chad*!"

"Good Lord!" King gasped.

Avena was descending from the throne, coming toward them.

"Well, man from another world, what do you think now?" she questioned.

"I think you are very brave and very strong person," King answered. "And, I am proud of you."

"Thank you."

"But—I am wondering. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Lardon and the nobles, they won't take this change lying down. You've got them whipped now, because they don't know what happened to their *chad*. But when they find out what happened, they'll be back to see us, and, unless I miss my guess, there will be trouble."

"Of course there will be trouble," the girl answered. "But there is always trouble. And we are not afraid, you and I, are we?"

"Maybe you're not," King answered. "But I sure as bell am!"

IX

ODDLY, during the days that followed, the noble hunters of Akkan made no effort to resist the decree that had deprived them of most of their privileges. They could be seen going about the streets of the city directing the work of the clean-up squads, supervising the repair of the buildings. It was a long job they had ahead of them. Centuries of neglect could not be repaired in a few days. Months, years,

would be needed. But eventually Akkan would be restored to its former beauty.

"At least they can look forward to steady employment," King said to Avena, as they watched one of the groups moving blocks of stone.

Silently she assented. These days she was mostly given to silences. Watching her surreptitiously, King could not begin to understand her. He knew that in the past she had been a deadly huntress of humans, the leader of the hunting caste of Akkan. In a few words she had decreed the end of hunting forever, she had uprooted a whole social system, and instead of being a wasteful idler, had become a hard worker for the welfare of her people. She had made a tremendous change in the lives of the Akkar, and she, too, had changed. The silences were an indication of the change but the thoughts that moved in the back of that sleek head she kept strictly to herself. On one point she was adamant. She would not go back into the forests nor would she permit King to go. He wanted to get back to his comrades, to tell them what had happened, to let them know they were free to come out of hiding, that no longer would they be hunted like wild animals through the game preserves. King could not tell Avena they existed and to all his suggestions that he go to the forests just to look around she returned a firm, "No."

"Why?" he questioned.

"I hate the forests of the game preserves," she answered. "I hate them. I—I used to hunt there."

Only a psychiatrist could have provided a satisfactory explanation for her reaction, but she seemed to have decided that hunting was wrong and in consequence had no desire to go back to the hunting grounds and be reminded of the things she had done there in the past.

IF AVENA was silent, Kathor was bubbling over with jubilant talk. "Now," the aged technician was constantly saying. "Now we can make progress again. Now the long years, the long centuries of stagnation are finished. We can begin research—I have already made plans—into all the sciences. We can reopen the neglected schools. Possibly," he looked slyly at King, "we can go into your world and see for ourselves, meet your scientists, your wise men. By pooling the knowledge of two worlds, each world would gain much."

"Possibly," said King. "But in the meantime, are you sure these nobles are going to take their slap in the face lying down?"

"Of course. What else can they do? Avena has the whip hand over them and they are powerless." Kathor was quite emphatic but to King his certainty sounded like wishful thinking. He didn't like the looks of those hunters.

"Hm. Avena, of course, can stop the action of their *chad*. But at how great a distance is her control effective?"

"At how great a distance?" A sudden worried frown furrowed Kathor's forehead. "Why any *chad* within two hundred paces she can control at will. If her own *chad* is freshly charged, her control will be effective for at least three hundred paces. You don't think—"

"I'm not doing the thinking around here," King answered. "But if I were one of those former hunters I would go three hundred yards away from the princess and laugh at her. What would she do then?"

"Why—why—" the technician sputtered. "They haven't even discovered how she controls their *chad*. They haven't thought—"

"They haven't, eh? Where is Lardon?"

"Lardon? Lardon. Now that you mention it—"

"You haven't seen him since he tried to rebel?" King finished for him. "And neither have I."

"I'll institute a search immediately," Kathor promised. Like an agitated rabbit, he went hopping away.

King turned to Avena. "You, my lovely lady, are sitting on top of a block buster."

"I am not afraid," she answered. "In Akkan, we believe that no one dies but once."

"We have the same saying in my world," King answered. "But we put another twist on it: You may only die once but when you do die you're dead a hell of a long time."

SINCE she would not do it, he took precautions. He very carefully inspected her guards, without her knowledge set special guards at night. Kathor helping, he instituted a careful system designed to catch sneaking killers trying to approach in the dark. In the meantime, Lardon remained missing, nor could Kathor uncover any trace of him.

Then, entering his rooms late one night, King discovered what had happened to Lardon.

There was a dead man, lying naked and face down on the floor. A neat round hole, the work of a *chad*, had been burned between his shoulder blades. King dropped to his knees, turned the man over, recoiled.

The man was not an Akkar. He was an American. He was Hillson, Sorenson's prize assistant.

A Yank, from Sorenson's hideaway, dead in King's rooms in the palace of Avena.

Lying beside him was a note. It was written in English!

"We have your friends who were hid-

ing in the caverns. As proof that we have them, we offer this man. A knife in the throat of the Princess Avena will win for you and for them free passage back to your world. Fail us in this and one by one we will lay your friends before you, the girl last. Choose!"

The note was signed AKBAD.

Lardon had gone for Akbad. The ruler of the Temple of Forbidden Delight had come here, to Akkan, to direct the revolt of the nobles! Somehow the presence of the Americans had been discovered. Akbad was using them as a lever to force King to strike at Avena. And Hillson, whose heart and soul had been wrapped up in electro-dynamics, Hillson, with his penchant for tinkering and his mechanical mind, lay dead in King's room.

A KNIFE in Avena's throat or your friends die one by one! Leda, Leda of the clear blue eyes and the tiny fringe of freckles on her nose, Leda will die last. King had a vision of finding her in his room. Leda, with a hole burned through her. He sickened as revulsion shot through him. He had another vision, of a knife driving into the white throat of Avena, life ebbing from her in a spurting stream of red, and the sickness deepened.

"Lord!" he groaned. "Why don't I just commit suicide and have it over with?"

Avena—or Leda and the Americans! He did not in the least doubt that Akbad would carry out his threat. Either Avena died by King's hand or one by one corpses would be laid on his doorstep. Akbad had shrewdly selected the one person who could get to her.

The creak of the opening door came to his ears. The note still in his fingers, he leaped to his feet. The door opened.

Avena and Kathor entered. They looked at King, then their eyes centered

on the body on the floor.

"What is this?" Kathor questioned.

"I found him here when I came in," King answered.

"Ah. Did you kill him? No, I see you didn't." Examining the body, Kathor had already discovered the mark of the *chad*. Almost instantly he made another discovery, one that startled him even more than the body himself. "Hello! This man is no Akkar! He—he—" Kathor looked at King.

"So I had discovered," King said.

"But how would an American, how would one of your race, get here?"

"Probably the same way I got here—through Akbad's genial hospitality."

"Yes, of course." Kathor turned perplexed eyes toward Avena. "We have forgotten about Akbad. Something must be done—"

Avena nodded. "I agree that something must be done about Akbad. But at the moment I am more concerned about—" She looked at King.

He thrust the note into his pocket. "You mean, they are trying to kill me? I don't think so. If they had wanted to kill me, they would have killed me and that would have been the end of it. As to the mystery of this man, I don't know a thing, except that I found him here. As to who killed him, or why, or how he got here—" He shrugged. "I was just going to call you when you entered." His eyes passed quickly over her throat.

Perplexed, Avena looked at him. She didn't dispute what he had said but she didn't exactly seem to believe him either. The doubt in her mind was mirrored on her face. "Kathor and I had come to talk," she said. "This—this rather gives me something else to think about. Come, Kathor."

Turning, she left the room. The aged technician bobbed after her.

A FEW minutes later slaves entered and removed the body from the floor. King made no objection. Opening the door, he discovered that extra palace guards had been posted in the corridor outside his room.

Had they been placed there to protect him from what Avena thought was an assassination attempt, or had they been assigned to keep him under close watch?

"Damn!" he said. In his mind was a single thought: What the hell was he going to do? A glitter on the table in the room caught his eyes. A dagger with a six-inch blade that was razor-sharp and needle-pointed lay there. Left for him to use! For a long time he stared at the knife. Then he picked it up, thrust it into his pocket. A grim look settled on his face.

King's preparations were swiftly made. He made a roll out of a small rug, placed it in his bed. Anyone glancing into the room would think that he was safely asleep, he hoped! His more fervent hope was that no one would look for him. He went to the window, gently shoved the heavy pane aside. A tough clinging vine similar to ivy had found the wall to its liking. Its knotted, winding branches were an inch thick. King gently tested them. Like a slowly moving shadow he went down the wall.

Half an hour later he was in Lardon's bedroom.

"Damn!" he said.

Lardon was absent. King had hoped the bull-necked noble would have returned. If he could find Lardon—well, there were some questions he wanted to ask, questions that Lardon might be able to answer.

"What now?" he thought.

Logically, there was only one thing to do—search until he had found another noble. The probability was that

others beside Lardon would be able to answer his questions. He turned to the door, started to leave, stopped. Stealthy footsteps were audible in the hall outside. Back against the wall, King crouched in the shadows, waiting. The barely burning glow light provided the only illumination in the room. The door opened an inch. King held his breath.

SOMEONE out there in the hall was peering intently into the room. A thief, King wondered. Or an assassin?

It might be either. Lardon was rich enough and displayed his wealth openly enough to attract the attention of all the thieves in Akka. He was also mean enough to have made many enemies. King waited. The door opened another inch, then was shoved all the way open. Lardon entered the room.

He went directly to a heavy metal chest, stooped over it, began to fumble with the lock. No *ched* floated over him.

King's voice in his ear sent a gasping wheeze from his throat.

"If you move, I'll have this knife in your back."

"Huh!—Who—what—"

"Shut up!"

"Uh!"

The needle-point of the blade pricked him in the back. "What—Who are you?"

"Turn around and look."

Lardon turned slowly. A grimace passed over his face when he saw King.

"You—" he whispered.

"Yes."

"What—what do you want?"

"I want you to take me to the Americans that Akbad is holding prisoner."

"Huh?"

"You heard me!"

"But—I can't do that. I mean, I don't know what you're talking about."

I don't know anything about any prisoners. Who—who is Akbad?"

"I heard you the first time," King said.

"But I don't—"

"Shut up! Either you take me to them or—"

Lardon was still on his knees. Half-way turned around, he was looking up. The knife point went through the robe he was wearing, went into his flesh.

"Don't—don't—don't"

"Either take me where I want to go or—" Projecting an inch beyond his fingers in the deadly grip of the knife fighter, the flick of King's wrist sent the blade of the knife through the air a fraction of an inch from Lardon's throat.

"Don't—" he gulped.

"Either or else."

"I'll take you! I'll take you! I'll take!" Lardon spoke so rapidly that the words ran together. He rose to his feet.

WITH King following a step behind him, he led the way out of the room. "If you are tempted to try to escape," King said, "Remember, I'll have this knife between your ribs before you can take a second step. I can also do a very nice job of throwing it," he added grimly.

"I'll take you to them," Lardon promised.

"Take me so we don't get caught," King cautioned. "If you lead me into a trap and some of your friends jump me, I'll get you before they get me."

From his start, King guessed that Lardon had been planning exactly that. "I'll take you by a secret path," he said. And because there was a knife at his back, he kept his promise, but before he reached the place where the Americans were held, there were many times when King thought the Akkar was deliberately leading him on a wild goose

chase.

The Americans were not held in a building in the city, as King had thought they would be. Nor were they in the surrounding forest although Lardon started in that direction. The path he eventually took led downward into a labyrinth of caves so extensive they seemed to extend for miles. Using an adaptation of the glow lamps as a flashlight to illuminate their way, Lardon moved cautiously through the caverns. He was scared though it was impossible to tell whether the source of his fear lay in the knife held at his back, in the possibility that Akbad might discover them, or in something else. Nervously Lardon looked over his shoulder, his eyes darting in every direction. Sweat dripped from his face.

"Sweat, damn you," King said. "If you're tricking me, you won't sweat long."

"I'm not tricking you," the Akkar protested. "The prisoners are held not far ahead. Be a little more careful with that knife."

"What about the guards?"

"There are no guards. I—we—the possibility of rescue never occurred to us so we did not think it necessary to place guards over them."

"Good," King grunted.

"We are there," Lardon said. "Here is the door of the room where they are held. See, I did not trick you."

A GRILL of heavy iron bars was the door. It was set in massive iron hinges bolted against the stone. Thick bars of iron crossed the front of the grill, effectively shutting it. The whole device was primitive in the extreme but it was ingeniously constructed so that the prisoner held behind those bars had no chance of escaping by his own efforts.

And there was someone behind the bars! King caught a glimpse of movement, as of someone drawing back out of sight, when he came up. Lardon turned the light from his torch into the cell. Then, from behind the iron grill, a voice drawled.

"Well I'll be damned! If it isn't Sandy King!"

Cal Carson's voice. A voice King would know anywhere.

"Cal! Are you all there? Are you all right?"

"We're all right," Carson answered. "And all of us are here except Hillson. They took him away and he didn't come back. I don't know what happened to him."

"I know," King gritted. He shoved the bars out of their niches. They came crowding out to greet him with exclamations of astonishment, Leda, Sorenson, looking as though he had aged years since King saw him last, Rogers, Sin Yul, the technicians he had met working in Sorenson's laboratory.

"King!"

"We're glad you turned up, old man."

"What the hell happened to you?"

"Glad to see you alive, sir. Make leave to guess they got you knocked in head by now." This was Sin Yul speaking. "How you find us boss?"

"Lardon here, was kind enough to guide me," King grinned, nodding toward the Akkar. "As to anything else you want to know, it will have to wait. Come on. We've got to get away from here."

"What are you going to do with me?" Lardon protested.

"We'll take you with us. Avena will know what to do with you."

"Avena! If you turn me over to her, she will have me killed."

"I think not," King answered. "You may be a rat but you've earned your life and I think she'll let you keep it.

Come on. Lead us out of here, Lardon. I want to take these people to Avena immediately."

At a trot, Lardon started to lead them out of the caverns. King followed close behind him. He had no intention of trusting the Akkar out of reach of his knife, not until they were safely back in the city. As they hurried along, he told the story of what had happened to him.

"You mean Avena had announced the end of the hunting in Akkan?" Sorenson questioned incredulously.

"Yes."

"I can scarcely believe it. After all, for her to renounce hunting would require changing her whole nature. It would be easier for the leopard to change its spots than for the ruler of Akkan to change the hunting customs of herself and her people."

"That's what she did," King insisted.

"That may be," Sorenson stubbornly said. "But I have been living in fear of her and of her nobles for too many years to accept that idea easily. I'll believe it when I see it."

"You'll see it soon enough," King answered. "We have been misjudging her. She was a huntress because hunting was the custom of her people and no one had ever told her it was wrong. Good Lord, what's that?"

ALMOST running over Lardon, he slid to a halt. Ahead of them, dancing in the darkness of the large cavern through which they were passing, was a glowing *chad*. It was coming slowly toward them.

"Back!" King ordered.

Before he could move, he saw, out of the corner of his eyes, a *chad* appear behind them. It seemingly dropped from up above. On their right was a wall. To the left was the darkness of a large cavern.

Dropping from somewhere above them, like snowflakes in a sudden storm, were dozens of the glowing balls. Lardon suddenly gibbered in fear. Carson cursed. Leda gasped. King stood without moving. A sloping ledge coming down the wall on their right provided a passage from somewhere up above down to their level. Akkar were descending the ledge.

It was these Akkar who controlled the *chad*. They had spotted the Americans passing below, and had trapped them.

A FILE of robe-clad Akkar came swiftly down the ledge. Moving with the precision of a well-trained infantry drill team, they surrounded the Americans, hemmed them against the wall, the glowing *chad* darting overhead.

King looked at Lardon. "If ever I get out of here alive, you had better start running and never stop."

In his mind was the thought that Lardon had led them into a trap, that he had taken them along a route where Akbad would be certain to discover them. He turned to face the leader of the group that had caught them.

The leader wasn't Akbad. It was Avena. Kathor was with her. They came down the ledge, walked toward him. The light of the glowing *chad* clearly revealed Avena's face. Marble-white, it was stone-hard. No trace of any emotion showed on it. Her gaze went from King to the group with him, rested for a moment on Lardon, then returned to King.

"Well?" she said.

"Where did you come from?"

"I sent Kathor to your quarters to talk to you. When he reported you were missing, I ordered a search. One of my men reported he had seen you and someone else slipping into the cav-

erns. We came here looking for you."

"I see."

"What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Is it necessary that I say anything?"

"I think you had better say something," Avena answered, and her voice was as cold as a wind blowing over glacial ice. "I find you here with a man who is my deadly enemy, with Lardon, who tried to revolt against my laws. I also find you with a group of your own people, a group that I never knew existed. The appearance is that you are conspiring against me."

The words were ice cold. King could not question the remorseless logic in them. From her viewpoint, it looked as if he might be conspiring against her!

He shrugged. "Do you believe that?"

"What I believe is of no importance. What are you doing with Lardon?"

"Ask Lardon," King answered.

"I'm asking you."

KING was silent. What could he say? Could he tell her that he had forced Lardon at the point of a knife to guide him to the Americans?

"Who are these people?" She pointed at the Americans.

"Friends of mine."

"What are they doing here? How did they get here?"

"That's a question I would like to have answered myself," King said. "They were brought here. But how they were discovered in the first place—" Ever since he had learned the Yanks had been captured and were being held as prisoners, this question had been in the back of his mind: How had they been caught in the first place? How had Akbad learned their hiding place?

"Who brought them here?"

King shrugged.

"Enough of this!" Her voice was zero cold. "If you have an explanation, I am willing to listen. If not—"

The deadly billiard balls danced madly at her implied threat. King knew she meant what she said. Deep within him admiration surged. He had lived a hard life among hard people and he could understand and appreciate hardness when he met it. She was hard, as hard as steel, when the situation demanded it. And she had courage, the courage to be ruthless. He grinned.

"When you put your foot down, you really put it down, don't you? Okay, Avena, if you must know why Lardon is here—he came at my urgent invitation. And I came because of these." He handed her the knife and the threatening note.

The knife she could understand, the note, written in English, she could not understand. As he translated it for her and as the meaning reached her mind, all traces of color left her cheeks.

"King! Either you killed me or he killed your friends!"

"Something like that."

"But why didn't you come to me?"

"And have Akhad deliver these people to me one by one? Almost certainly he has spies around you. He would learn that I had told you of his threat."

"But if you had come to me, I could have given you help in finding and rescuing them. You might have been killed, trying to save them without help."

King laughed. "We are not afraid of death, you and I. Remember, Avena, when you said that?"

She shivered, shook her head. "I would rather not be reminded. I did not mean—"

THE hard, brittle shell with which she surrounded herself had been broken. For a moment the real person underneath the shell showed through, a very badly frightened, badly scared girl who was putting up a front.

"What—what are we going to do?"

"Goodness gracious!" King drawled. "Does that question mean you've decided I'm to run the show from now on?"

"Well—"

"Yes or no."

"Yes," she said breathlessly. "You are running the show. What are we going to do?"

"The first thing—get the hell out of here while we can. The second thing—find Akhad. Lardon, here, may be able to help us in that."

"I don't know a thing," Lardon said hastily. "Akhad—"

"Didn't exactly trust you, eh? Well—What is it, Cal?"

"I want to talk to you, Sandy," the ex-sergeant said.

"Go on and talk."

"I mean alone."

"Oh. Okay." He followed Carson away from the group. "What you got on your mind, Cal?"

"I think I know how we were captured."

"Um! Make with the information. How did they manage to catch all of you?"

"We were in the cave and we didn't know anybody was within miles of us," Carson answered. "Bingo! These gorillas popped up all around us. We didn't have a chance."

"Um."

"They seemed to know every entrance, every hiding place in the joint."

"Yes?"

"It means somebody told them where we were and how to get there. Their information was perfect. They knew

exactly where we were and how to go to get to us."

"Damn! Who—"

"Sin Yul!"

"Sin Yul!"

Carson nodded doggedly. "I think so. He was missing a long time before we were captured. Later, after they had caught us, those gorillas came dragging him in as if they had found him hiding someplace. I don't think they found him hiding. I think he went to them and told them where we were. After they had caught us, I think they planted him back on us so as a spy."

"**B**UT that doesn't seem possible," King protested. "Sin Yul would have no motive for betraying you. He wouldn't gain anything by it."

"The hell he wouldn't! I think he went to the city on an exploring expedition of his own, and got caught. When he discovered which way the wind was blowing, he told Akbad where we were. He would gain something by turning us in. He would get to be on what he thought would be the winning side. And that's kind of important, Sandy, to be on the winning side."

Carson's reasoning seemed logical enough. "Damn him, anyhow!" King said. "I'll shake the truth out of him. Sin Yul!" he yelled. "Come here."

There was no answer.

"Where the hell is he? He was here when I opened that door and turned you loose. Sin Yul!"

A quick search revealed that Sin Yul was missing. King stared at Carson. "That tears it," he said. "That dirty such-and-such. If he's missing, there can be only one meaning—that he has gone to Akbad! Come on. Let's get out of here."

As if in answer, from somewhere in the darkness overhead there came a burst of laughter. A faraway voice

whispered. "You may find that easier to say than to do, Captain King, much easier to say than to do."

Akbad's voice! Akbad's faraway whisper, coming through the medium of a *chad*, the whisper as they had first heard it in the ruined Dak bungalow outside the temple of Forbidden Delight, in Upper Burma.

Simultaneously from somewhere up above there came a scream as a sentinel that Avena had left behind to serve as a lookout found sudden death striking him. A *chad* streaked with red light leaped into sight in the darkness overhead. An object hurtled down through the darkness to strike with a heavy thud on the floor—the luckless sentinel.

Instantly there leaped out from the shelf where the sentry had been hiding—dozens of glowing billiard balls! Like falling stars they dropped downward toward the group below.

Akbad had caught Avena and her entire party in a deadly trap. Avena and Kathor, many of the technicians who had supported the change in the laws of Akkan, part of the loyal palace guard, he had caught them all. The *chad* hurtling downward showed what he intended to do.

"Stop those *chad*!" King barked.

FROM the floor he scooped up the knife that he had given to Avena and which she had dropped. The gesture was instinctive. He could not fight one of those glowing billiard balls with a knife. Avena would have to stop them. She had stopped the *chad* when the nobles had attempted to rebel. She would stop them again.

King saw the look of concentration deepen on her face as the mental impulses flowed out through the *chad* that she controlled.

"Stop!" he seemed to hear her say. "I order you to stop."

The dropping *chad* faltered in their flight, hesitated for an instant, then continued coming down. They were moving slower now, but they were still moving.

Avena looked at King. Startled surprise was on her face. "I can't—control them!" she whispered.

"You can't!"

"No."

"They have discovered the changes we made in the *chad*!" Kathor gasped. "They have changed them so that Avena no longer has control over them. Fight!"

Although King had not thought about it until that moment, it was logical that a people who had developed a weapon such as the *chad*, who used it for hunting and for fighting, would also have developed a method of defense against it. Weapons and defenses had developed that way on earth. The shield had been developed as a defense against the bow, the sword, and the spear. Steel mail was still a later method of protection. When the machine gun was invented, trench warfare had appeared as a countermeasure. When the tank had appeared on the scene, the mobile anti-tank gun had put in an appearance. What did the Akkan use to defend themselves against the *chad*?

King saw what they used. *Chad*! The weapon was its own defense. Sword against sword, bow against bow, rifle against rifle, cannon against cannon, *chad* against *chad*. As Kathor, Avena, her guards and Kathor's trusted technicians went into action, the vast cavern was instantly filled with dozens of fiercely contested duels. The loyal guard formed a solid ring around Avena. In front of them, over them, behind them, their own *chad* darted. Like fierce duelists armed with bolts of ball lightning instead of swords, they thrust and counterthrust at each other.

The *chad* darting toward a guard was met and turned aside. Or was not met and turned aside. In which case the *chad* vanished to reappear a moment later red-filmed above the body of the falling guard. King saw three of the guards go down, saw Kathor fumbling with a left arm that no longer existed, saw Avena narrowly avert a *chad* charging at her, and knew that this battle could have but one end.

"Retreat!" he yelled.

Avena heard and understood him.

At her order the guards began a fighting retreat toward the dark tunnel at the far end of the cavern. Once there, they would have a fighting chance. But first they had to get there.

"Carson. Rogers. Two others!"

The Americans standing to one side had taken no part in the fight as yet. Probably because they did not represent a source of danger, the *chad* had not attacked them. Once Avena and her followers had gone down, the unarmed Americans would present no problem. So, for the present, Akkan left them alone.

"What is it, Sandy?"

"The rest of you get out of here the best way you can. You four come with me."

With Carson and the other three at his heels he slid along the wall until he came to the sloping edge.

"We going up, Sandy?" Carson questioned.

"We are," King answered.

"Wish I had me a Tommy-gun."

"So do I," King said. "But all I've got is a knife and all you've got is your fists. They're not enough but they're all we've got. If we can distract that bunch up above for a few minutes, Avena will have a chance to get away."

"Yeah."

"Keep close to the wall and pray

they're too busy to notice us."

Like shadows, King and the four men went up the ledge. It was a rough natural slope, the product of some mountain convulsion of the long past. The footing was rough but the cover was good. King reached the top.

Akbad was readily visible. Leaning eagerly over the ledge, he was directing the activities of his *chad* fighting down below. With him was—Sin Yul.

"That rat!" King grated. "As soon as we turned him loose he ran straight to Akbad and told him where we were. That's how he located us so damned easily."

From the sloping ledge, King leaped up to the shelf. Akbad saw the movement.

"Look out!" he yelled.

Knife in hand, King dived toward him. Akbad ducked away. Simultaneously a noble looking up just in time to see what was happening butted his head into King's stomach. The move was as unexpected as it was disastrous. All the air knocked out of him, King fell heavily. His head struck the wall behind the shelf. He was knocked instantly unconscious.

King was out only a few seconds. As consciousness slowly returned, he found Sin Yul bending over him. Sin Yul was talking too fast to be understood.

DOWN on the shelf a hell of a fracas was going on. A knot of nobles surrounded something. One of the nobles suddenly lifted into the air. Arms and legs whirling, he was thrown over the edge of the shelf, went soaring downward like some vast ungainly bird.

"Give 'em hell, Cal!" King croaked. That was Carson and the other two Yanks down there in that knot of nobles. Swinging fists, feet, kicking, slugging, they were putting up a good fight. It was a fight that could have but one

end. A gleaming *chad* darted up from below.

"Look out," King croaked. "They're calling back their dogs." He tried to get to his feet. There was no strength in his legs. "Huh? What's that?"

Sin Yul had forced himself into King's vision. "What's that you said?"

"You going to die, Yank!" Sin Yul repeated.

King considered this. It did not seem at all remarkable to him. "So what?" he said. "So what if I don't care?"

"You care plenty," Sin Yul shrieked. "You think me Burmese? Me no Burmese. Me Japanese!"

"Huh?" King heard the words but they didn't seem to make sense.

"High command bear stories of this land," Sin Yul shouted. He was apparently determined that King would pay attention to him. "Send me to investigate. You hire as guide. Not know this very place me trying to reach. Hah! Smart Yank fooled by Japanese."

"Well, I'm damned!" King said. "A Jap spy!" Sin Yul's words had finally penetrated to his consciousness.

"Me get secret of glass airship, secret of *chad*, take back to Japan," Sin Yul gloated. "Japan use to fight another war. This time Yankees don't win. How you like that, huh?"

King was silent. Shocked comprehension had numbed his brain. The war lords of Japan, with the secret of the *chad*, the secret of the glass bubbles that floated so easily. He could easily imagine what that meant. Jap industry would build those deadly weapons in secret, ferret out the design, improve on it. Pearl Harbor would happen all over again, Pearl Harbor on a bigger, vastly more destructive scale.

"How you like that, huh?" Sin Yul exulted.

"I don't like it," King said.

"Nothing you can do about it, Yankee. You die now. See *chad*. Me got *chad*. See *chad* coming, Yankee."

ENJOYING his moment of triumph, Sin Yul sent the *chad* toward King. An inch at a time it moved closer. King stared at it, at the grinning face behind it. Sin Yul had certainly fooled him.

"See *chad* coming, Yank!"

"See knife coming, Jap!"

With all his strength, King struck upward. The knife was buried to its hilt in Sin Yul's chest.

A look of horrified astonishment spread over his face. He clutched at the knife handle, staggered, fell, did not get up. His uncontrolled *chad* hung motionless.

"Give 'em hell, Cal!" King screamed, leaping to his feet.

A battle was going on there on the shelf where Carson and the three Yanks fought against desperate odds. Like King, Carson had had commando training, and when you've had that, you've learned everything there is to know about rough and tumble fighting. But commando training or not, there could be only one end to this fight. King knew the end, knew it was close when one of the Americans screamed as a *chad* burned its way through him.

"Destroy them!" Akbad was yelling.

King stumbled toward the group.

It seemed to dissolve in front of him, dissolve in a flare of milky billiard balls that moved so rapidly they looked like shooting stars. At the same instant, Akbad stopped yelling. Abruptly the nobles lost all interest in the fight, began to run. Stupified, King stared at them, wondering what had caused their sudden flight. He saw the reason. A dozen of her guards behind her, Avena came up the ledge. The *chad* that had at-

tacked the nobles came from this group. She saw King.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm alive," he said. "I'm alive."

From the tangle of bodies on the rough floor of the ledge, Carson rose to his feet. "So am I, Sandy," he said. "And am I surprised!"

One Yank was dead. A second could barely walk. A *chad* had grazed his leg, shearing a hole through the flesh. Carson, Rogers, were badly battered, but alive.

King surveyed the scene. "Anyhow, Akbad has taken air. Now I think we had better get the hell out of here ourselves!"

Avena nodded agreement. "We must get out and rally all my people. They will fight on my side in this battle. I know they will."

"Then come on," King said. "And incidentally, for charging up this ledge, thanks."

"You're welcome," she smiled.

XI

THREE hours later they were still in the caverns, and facing one grim fact: they were not going to get out, not without a battle against hopeless odds.

Every exit was guarded by Akbad's nobles. Every time they had come to an exit they had discovered a cleverly-laid ambush set for them.

"Sandy, it looks like we're supposed to stay here," Cal Carson said.

"Looks that way," King admitted. "But anyhow they're not coming in after us. And if they do come in, they'll not only have a hell of a time finding us in this labyrinth but they'll have to dodge some ambushes of ours." He turned to Avena. "Do you think they'll come in after us?"

"No," she said. "Akbad will not

quite dare. He controls many of the nobles but many others are only half-hearted in their rebellion. He doesn't dare trust the half-hearted ones. They might find me and betray him. So he will make them guard the exits. Meanwhile, he will try to plan some way to destroy us."

"Uh! As what?"

"I don't know. But whatever he does, must be done quickly, before the people learn what he is attempting and come to my rescue."

"Do you think they will come?"

"I know it. They will support my new laws because the laws benefit them. I think they have caught something of the vision I had, that Kathor had, of a new and glorious Akkan, of peace and progress and honest work, of a marching forward in the way that our ancestors did before we got off the track. Yes, they will support me. The workers, the technicians, the scientists, because I have given them something to live for."

She seemed very sure.

In the world outside the caverns, dawn was breaking. Looking out, they could see the streaks of day beginning to appear. King saw something else.

"Maybe that's your people coming now," he said, pointing.

Out there beyond the cave he had caught a glimpse of movement. The movement continued. In a few minutes it had resolved itself into vast number of Akkar—all moving toward the cave.

"They're coming!" Avena thrilled. "They're coming. I told you they would come."

"By gad, you're right!" King said. The sight of the Akkar coming to the caverns to rescue their princess sent a surge of emotion through him. They were all right, those Akkar, once they learned the way. Or at least the com-

mon people, the workers, the technicians, were all right. He still had his doubts about the nobles but seeing the approaching throng he could no longer doubt that the great multitude was back of their ruler, coming to save her.

BACK in the darkness of the cavern a sentry on guard cried a sharp challenge. "Someone comes!" he called out.

"Bring him here," Avena ordered.

The guard led the Akkar forward. He was panting, gasping for breath, so near exhaustion that he could barely stand. He threw himself on the ground before Avena.

"My Princess! I knew he lied. I came. I hunted for you. I have run and run—"

"What's this?" Avena sharply questioned.

The Akkar fought for breath to continue. "Akhad! Lardon!" he whispered. "Akhad came to us. He said that the real Princess Avena was dead, that this magician from earth—" He pointed to King. "—had killed her. Akhad said that this magician had put another princess in your place, a spurious, false princess, that it was this false princess who had announced the changing of the laws. Akhad told us that he and the nobles had trapped the magician and a number of other magicians in the caverns and—and—" He ran out of breath.

Avena gasped. King saw the lines of fear dig into her face. There was silence in the cave, complete silence.

"But that isn't true," Avena protested.

"I knew it wasn't true and I came to tell you," the messenger answered. "But everyone else believes it is true and—"

"And what?"

"They come to help Akhad hunt the

magician and the false princess in the caverns, they come to destroy you."

As though his strength had run out, the messenger slid down to the ground. The wheeze of his panting lungs as he fought for breath was the only sound.

King looked at Avena. "So *that's* why they're coming," he said. "To hunt us down—"

Her soul was in her eyes. "I'm sorry," she said.

He patted her on the shoulder. "That's all right. We've done the best we could. Now—"

"Now we are going to do something else!"

He stared at her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean—Akbad hasn't won yet. There is still one course I can take. And I am going to take it. But first—" She hesitated, looked at King, looked from him to the Americans, looked back at him. "No, it would not be right. It would not be fair. Guards!"

Her guards snapped to attention.

"Hold this entrance. Let no one enter."

"Yes, Princess."

She looked at King. "You and your friends come with me."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Come. I'll show you. I know a trick that Akbad has forgotten."

FOUR of her guards and the Americans went with her. Moving at a trot, she turned back into the caverns. Without explaining, scarcely looking back, she went deeper and deeper into the caves until she was at least a mile underground. The glowing *chad* in front of her dimly lighted the way. They came to a place where the natural cave had been enlarged, where a tunnel had been dug ages past, they came to an iron grill that was a door.

Her attendants swiftly removed the bars.

"Come on," she said, without hesitation.

King and the Americans followed her into a round chamber from which there was no exit. A split second too late King realized there was no way out except the way they had entered. "Hey—" he yelled, turning.

Clanging, the guards swung the grill shut. Avena was on the side away from the Americans. King stared at her.

"I am going back," she said. "To challenge Akbad to the Duel of the Ruler."

"Duel of the Ruler?"

"Yes. That is the privilege of the ruler of Akkan. When the laws are disputed or when anyone rebels, the ruler may challenge to the duel. Armed each with a *chad*, they fight in the arena. If the ruler wins, the laws are upheld. If the rebel wins, naturally the law is changed."

"But— You can't mean it!"

"I do mean it?"

"You are going to fight Akbad?"

"Yes."

"But— He won't fight you."

"If he refuses, even his own nobles will turn against him. Remember, they do not all of them support him wholeheartedly. If he refuses to meet me in the Duel of the Rulers, they will destroy him without mercy. That is our custom and the custom is stronger than Akbad. Yes, he will fight me. He will have no choice."

"But you can't do it. It's senseless. A custom like that could only be in effect when a man is on the throne. You're a woman—"

"Am I a coward because of that?"

"No. But— Damn it, Avena, if this is the only way out, let me fight the duel for you."

LIGHTS glistened in her eyes. "No," she said firmly. "This is my fight. I may not let another fight in my place."

King gave up. In the face of her determination, arguments were useless. "But why did you bring us here?" he demanded. "Why did you lock us up while you go back to fight a duel?"

"Because I am sorry," she said.

"Sorry? For what?"

"Sorry for some of the things I did when I was the Huntress of Akkan. I hunted your people. Because I am sorry for that, I am making certain that you and your friends are safe even—even if I lose to Akbad. And if I should lose, you and your friends would go back into the game preserves to furnish sport for Akbad and his nobles."

"I still don't understand," King protested. "Why have you locked us in here?"

"You will understand in a moment," she said. "Can't you feel it taking hold of you already? I can feel it out here."

"Feel what?"

"The blowing of the wind."

"What!" There was incredulous amazement in King's voice. As he spoke he realized he was feeling—an invisible wind. Moving through every atom of his being, it was growing stronger every second.

"It is the earth current," Avena said. "In this spot it flows back to your world. It will take you back. And now, Sandy King, good luck and goodbye. And—"

The current tugged at him, tugged again and again, tugged stronger and stronger. He grabbed the bars, tried to hold on, tried to fight. A little by a little his grip failed. He felt the current pick him up, carry him, lift him.

Her heart in her eyes, Avena smiled at him. And smiling, vanished.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned in the prickling of ten thousand tiny needles. King sat up, opened his eyes. He was on the side of a mountain in a small ruined temple that had been hollowed out of the edge of a cliff. A mile away across a gorge was—the warty toad that was the Temple of Forbidden Delight.

Burma! Upper Burma. Earth.

Across from him Carson was dazedly getting to his feet, Sorenson, Leda, Rogers. He noticed that Rogers was trying to help Leda and she was trying to help him. Once this would have meant something to him, but no longer. The others were there, the fliers from Sorenson's hidden laboratory. All there. All of them.

Avena had kept her promise.

King still held the knife in his hands. He looked across the gorge, to that squat temple in the mountain. He started toward it.

"Sandy! Sandy!" This was Carson calling, Carson running after him.

"Take them back to civilization, Cal. Take them wherever they want to go. That's your job." King nodded toward the Americans.

"And you?" Carson questioned.

King nodded across the gorge.

"So that's the way it is, Sandy?"

"That's the way it is."

"Good luck."

"Goodbye."

King never quite realized how he got across the gorge, how he forded the roaring river at the bottom, how he climbed the steep road to the temple. There were guards at the temple, guards armed with cunning knives. They took one look at him, and fled. He entered. Somewhere deep within that granite mountain, he found the earth current. It picked him up.

The pit? Yes, this was the pit. He climbed out of it. This was the place

where he had met Leda, and this was the river where she had dived, this was the mountain. Over there—was Akkan. He walked toward the city. It had been morning when he left, morning of some day. It was dusk now. Night was near. He entered the city with the dusk. It was strangely deserted. The palace guards were gone. There weren't even any guards outside the chambers of the princess. Gently King opened the door.

Somewhere inside the dimly-lit room he could hear someone sobbing. She was lying on a couch, sobbing. When his footsteps sounded, she looked up.

"King!"

"I came back, Avena. There was a

fight."

"It didn't come off."

"No?"

"Akbad refused the duel and his nobles tore him limb from limb."

"Ob."

He was glad to hear this. The fight had not come off. Akbad had turned yellow. Yes, this was good to know. But somehow, Akbad and the doings of Akbad no longer seemed to be important.

"There's a balcony outside. I noticed it once."

"Yes."

She led the way. Outside there was the night, the soft night of Akkan, and a soft wind, and a million stars.



OCEAN ODDITIES



THE wonders of Nature have been unearthed by man in ever-growing numbers. We have probed the realms of the stars and the planets, reached into the mysteries of the human body and the human mind, successfully dug secrets from the bowels of the earth, even harnessed to our own use the torrents of our rivers and waterfalls. But we have only begun. Beside the innumerable questions that are still to be answered in the sciences into which we can see, we have yet to even scratch the surface of the mysteries that lie beneath the fathomless seas. In actual depth, as a matter of fact, man has been able to descend in specially constructed steel balls to a depth of $\frac{3}{4}$ a mile, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in an expanse that is so vast it defies the imagination!

Read these facts and then wonder: There are depths beneath the ocean's surface that could swallow Mt. Everest. In the North Pacific there is an unknown area twice as large as the United States! In other regions of the Pacific there are areas as large as Australia in which there has been not a single sounding taken to ascertain the depth and shape of the ocean floor! Three-fourths of the globe consists of salt water, and the volume of these oceans is eleven times the volume of all the land above sea level! If the mountains of the earth and the "depths" of the ocean were smoothed out, the whole earth would be covered with water to a depth of a mile and a half!

The problem of taking the first step in making a thorough study of the sea, that of determining the depth and shape of the ocean floor, has been practically solved. Recently scientists perfected a sounder which can measure the time it takes for a sound wave to reach the sea's bottom and return. This result, multiplied by the speed of sound in water, gives then the depth of the ocean floor at a particular point.

Such apparatus as well as other scientific tools have been added to the equipment of the Woods Hole, Massachusetts, laboratory which has done and is doing extensive research into this most fascinating riddle. With the award of two million five hundred thousand dollars from the Rockefeller Foundation as a stimulant to investigators, science has embarked on the ambitious project of gathering new facts about the high mountains and deep valleys of the ocean, about the rich mineral and oil deposits that are to be found there. They are making further progress toward the answer to the riddle of the birth of the earth which may be solved from deep sea evidence.

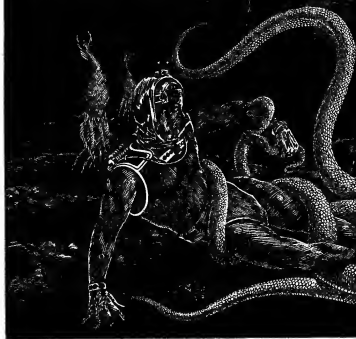
These investigations which scientists have made so far into the depths have not even scratched the surface. For every mile of ocean that has been sounded, there remains thousands of miles about which we know almost nothing. To the fearless explorers of the future there lies the task of uncovering these secrets of the sea.—A. Gee.



BUY VICTORY BONDS

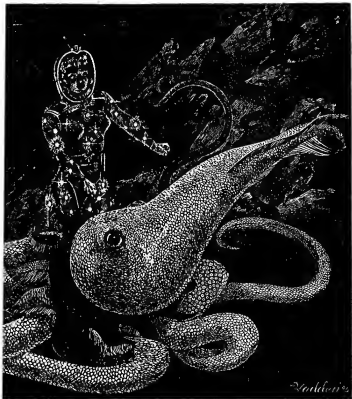


FINAL VICTIM



**By HENRY HASSE
and RAY BRADBURY**

*Hunting a criminal is tough enough,
but it's even tougher when it's on a bit
of Hell's own rock in the void of space!*



As she stood motionless, the tiny lights on her body glowed . . .

THE space-suited figure scrambled frantically over the edge of the ragged asteroid cliff, and lay panting from the exertion of the long climb upward. The pale face beneath the helmet was drawn in a tight grimace as it stared at the tiny Patrol ship on the plain below. No access to it now! He was trapped.

The young man rose to his feet, stared down the steep ravine he had just traversed. He saw the plodding figure of the Patrolman coming up toward him. There was a frightening relentlessness about that figure. He caught a dull glint of metal and knew the Patrolman had drawn his atom-blast.

"If only I hadn't lost my gun, down there!" And then he laughed bitterly, for he knew he never would have used it. He stepped out in plain sight, threw his hands up in the universal gesture of surrender. His mind was awry with bitter thoughts. He had never killed anyone in all his life! But the Patrol thought he had, and that's what counted now. He was glad it was all over. He would surrender, go back and face trial though the evidence was all against him.

Now the Patrolman's bulging, space-suited figure loomed up before him just ten yards away. He raised his hands still higher to make sure the other saw them.

The Patrolman saw them all right. His lips parted in a wide grin beneath his Crystyte plate. He lifted his big hand, full of dull metal, and took careful aim at the young man limned against the cobalt heaven.

There was something strange, and wrong, in the big Patrolman's grin. The youth waved frantically with his hands and screamed terrified words that only echoed inside his helmet until his eardrums rang. This was crazy! This couldn't happen! It was never in the Patrol's code to kill men in cold blood. . . .

His thoughts abruptly ceased. His helmet plate shattered inward and his face was a mask of red. He screamed, but it ended in a gurgling moan, as he tried with futile fingers to tear out the slug that was chewing at his brain. He sank to his knees, toppled over the cliff and did a crazy jerking dance as his gravity plates pulled him to the rock eighty feet below.

Jim Skeel, Patrolman, still grinned. "Number fourteen," said he, and holstered his gun.

Jim Skeel stalked triumphantly down to the base of the cliff. He

exulted with all six-feet-four of his big sun-parched body. He felt the palms of his hands a little sweaty as he clenched and unclenched them, and a curious tremor came over him as he viewed the body lying there. The familiar pounding of blood was in his temples again, a hot, fierce pounding.

FOR a long moment he closed his eyes tight and pressed hard fists against his temples and stood there trembling. But the fierce remembrance would not go away, as he knew it would not. Again the scene was with him that had haunted him through the years. Once again the flash of electro-guns tore through his tortured brain, and he saw defenseless men all about him dying and he heard their screams as they died. . . .

He stood quite still until his trembling stopped and that feeling went away. Then with his toe he nudged the young man's body so that it rolled over, and the pale leprous sunlight licked at the blood-masked features. "Pretty good shot," Skeel grunted. He bent and searched the body, retrieving all identification cards.

A sudden dark shadow swept over the scene. Skeel looked up, startled. Then he knew what it was. Utter night had come without any warning, as it always did on these slowly rotating asteroids. Toward the caverns and crannies at the base of the cliff he glimpsed vague horrid things, pale and wriggling, with sensitive amoeboid tentacles where eyes should have been. He heard strange sibilances from these asteroid creatures who hated light but loved the dark and loved blood, which they got too seldom.

Skeel arose hastily and hurried to his Patrol cruiser a short distance away. He looked back but once, and glimpsed scores of the vague nightmare shapes

swarming over a prone human form there in the cliff shadow.

CHAPTER II

ARRIVING at the Federation Patrol headquarters on Ceres Base, Skeel eased his solo cruiser into the glassite dome with an expert hand. None of the men spoke to him. They tried not even to look at him. But if Jim Skeel noticed this he gave no indication. He sauntered over to the door marked "Commander" and entered without knocking.

Commander Anders looked up from his desk. At sight of Skeel his leathery jaw tightened a little. A look of distaste flashed into his steel gray eyes.

"Reporting, sir," said Skeel. He carefully, a little too carefully, spread out the identification cards he had taken from the fugitive's pockets.

Anders rose slowly to his feet. His knuckles were white as he placed his fists on the desk and leaned tautly forward.

"You didn't capture the man?" Anders' voice was a monotone, as though he had asked that question more than once.

"Sorry, sir. He's dead."

"Dead." There was not much of surprise in Anders' voice. Then the voice and the gray eyes became simultaneously harder. "Did you kill him?"

"Kill him, sir?" Skeel's eyebrows arched. "No, sir. I had to chase him clear to Asteroid 78 in the Lanisar Group, and there he—he fell off a cliff. I only had time to get his identification cards and get away, before the night creatures came swarming out. Sorry. . . ."

Anders kicked his chair back against the wall and came surging

around the desk. He was white-faced. "Sorry! You're not sorry, Skeel! In God's name, how do you have the ghastly nerve to come back here each and every time? How can you face me—no, more than that, how can you face your conscience? I wonder what goes on inside that riveted skull, behind that paper-maché expression of yours!" He paused and drew a breath. "What makes you kill, Skeel? How many does this make — eleven? Twelve?"

Skeel sighed, and spread his hands in an exaggerated gesture. "You always were a long winded louse, sir. There are Miller's papers. And I didn't kill him. He fell off a cliff. Is that all, sir?"

"No! That's not all!" Anders came even closer, and glared up at Skeel who towered above him. "You've been in the Patrol a long time, Skeel. Luckily, or I should say unluckily, your previous good record and your seniority permits you to get away with this—until we prove something. Some day you'll slip and we will prove it. I pray that day'll come soon!"

SKEEL'S own eyes, which had been amused, now took on a hard glint. He spoke and his voice was different.

"Since you bring up the subject of my seniority, let me remind you that it would permit me to take your place here if I so chose. I do not so choose —yet. As to the other thing you imagine about me, I could tell you a story, sir. A story that—" He stopped abruptly as the fierce rush of blood came to his throbbing temples again.

"Yes, man, go on! You were about to tell me why you kill." Anders waited. "Weren't you?"

"No, sir." Skeel's voice was a whisper now, but controlled.

"I know you must have some sort of hellish reason. But whatever the reason, it's an insult to everything you learned in the Federation Patrol! All right, Skeel, I'll tell you something about young Miller, your latest victim. He was innocent, do you hear? Innocent! The evidence against him was purely circumstantial, but now he has been cleared! I just got the news an hour ago!"

"You got the news—here? How?"

"Never mind how. It's authentic!"

Skeel didn't move a muscle. His face became a little paler and his eyes widened momentarily. Then his face was an impassive mask again.

"You see, Skeel?" Anders was livid with suppressed fury now. "Any normal man would squirm at the news I just told you! Any decent man would hlow his brains out at the thought of the ghastly thing he'd done! But not you, Skeel. No, not you, because you're neither a decent nor a normal man any longer! You've allowed this thing to get hold of you until it's a fetish, it's warped your brain and now it's become a sadistic pleasure . . . this killing. . ." Anders choked and couldn't go on.

"Is that all, sir?"

"That sure as hell is all! Isn't it enough? Get out of here! Get your filthy face out of my sight before I smash it to pulp."

Skeel's lips became a tight slash across his square featured face. He turned on his heel and strode stiffly out.

WITH an effort Anders stifled the rising anger in him. He strode across the room to the opposite door. It was slightly ajar. He flung it open.

The girl sitting in the next room looked up, but seemed to stare through Anders rather than at him. Her

slender uniformed figure was unbending as crystal, her knuckles white as she gripped the arms of the chair. Her eyes, an unbelievable blue, were now misted with the shock of horror. She didn't bother to brush back the lock of taffy-toned hair that had fallen down against the pallor of her cheek.

Anders spoke.

"You heard, Miss Miller?" he said quietly.

Her breath caught in her throat and it took her some seconds to speak. When she did her voice was terrible in its tonelessness.

"Yes, I heard . . . quite enough, Commander. Thanks."

"I'm truly sorry you had to learn about it this way! But I wanted you to see the man who killed your brother. You wouldn't have believed me otherwise."

"I—still find it a little hard to believe—and to understand." She rose very slowly and stood facing him. There was a world of contempt in her voice. "The Patrol never kills! *That's* what we've learned to believe. *That's* become a motto on three planets. The Patrol, the noble Patrol, guardians of the spaceways! What mockery! Why was my brother killed, Commander? Why is such a monster as this man Skeel allowed—"

"Miss Miller, please. I know it's hard for you, or any outsider to understand, but you must try. Skeel was once one of the best men we had. His reputation was clean as flame, and on the records it still is. Very few men stand above him in seniority, and in the Patrol that's what counts, because—"

"That's what counts, is it? I came here to Ceres from Mars, bringing my brother's release papers, only to learn that you'd sent this Skeel out after him; all the time *knowing*—"

ANDERS sighed, and spread his hands helplessly. "I see you still don't understand. But please believe me, if I'd known your brother was innocent I wouldn't have allowed Skeel to accept this assignment; no, not even if I'd have to ray him down and face court-martial for it! It was Skeel's mission if he wanted it. It was his prerogative to accept or refuse the assignment, and he never refuses them. And Miss Miller, I hope *this* will mean something to you: there's hardly a man in the Patrol who doesn't suspect Skeel for what he is, and hate him for it; but I doubt if any of 'em, given the chance, would obliterate him in cold blood. You see the code is ingrained deeply in these men. As yet there's no proof that Skeel is a killer."

"You speak glibly of proof," the girl echoed mockingly. "Why don't you *get* proof?"

"I'm going to! Personally. A frame-up is the only way. But it'll be hard, because the man always works alone."

"Yes, and then there is always the code against you. Well, Commander, I have no such code to hamper me and I am going to avenge my brother!" Nadia Miller's face, ordinarily lovely, was not lovely now. "I have a plan. I could use your help, but with or without your help I am going through with it. All I want is to get this man Skeel back out to those rocks—alone."

Anders smiled tolerantly. "That would be a dangerous thing, especially for a girl. Skeel's a deadly killer, an expert shot. And you'd be on your own, the Patrol couldn't sanction any such plan."

"Naturally, Commander. Will you listen to me for five minutes? I'll tell you how to get this man out of the Patrol before he kills other people whose only crime was a momentary

mental disturbance." Her face clouded with pain as she thought of her brother.

Anders listened as she unfolded her plan. When he spoke again there was less of doubt in his voice and a respectful admiration in his eyes.

"Miss Miller, I like your plan and I agree to it for one reason only. It has an advantage over anything I could attempt. Skeel suspects me now, and will see to it that any future assignment he accepts is fool-proof; but your idea might turn that very caution against him."

"I hope so. And you needn't worry about me. I know most of those big rocks in the asteroid belt well enough."

"All right. At least I can set the stage for you, and I wish I could do more." Anders looked at her with a sudden new interest, admiring the firm line of her chin, the trimness of her space uniform, the hard bold blueness of her eyes which he imagined could easily be soft on less drastic occasions than this. With an effort he brought his mind back to the immediate problem. "It will be at least a week from now. Ceres is no place for you, but since you're here I suggest you go over to Ceres City, the mining town on the other side of our little planet. I'll keep in touch with you and let you know just when to pick up your solo cruiser. Okay? Goodbye for now—and good luck!"

FOR three days Anders haunted the helio tower, doggedly flashing signals in the direction of Ganymede, currently the nearest of Jupiter's satellites. Their entire plan would depend on how soon the Ganymede Base received these signals. Sometimes atmospheric conditions weren't right and it took days to get a message through.

He was lucky. On the third day he received the answering flash that told

him his signal had been picked up. Quickly he checked the orbital positions of both planets, then sighted the huge silvery screens carefully and locked them into place. Manipulating the shields with expert fingers, Anders began his message.

HELLO GANYMEDE. CERES
BASE SENDING. ANSWER!
Minutes later it came:
CONDITIONS OKAY. GANY-
MEDE BASE SENDING. GO
AHEAD CERES.

Anders' fingers were lightning fast as he operated the rows of levers controlling the solar shields. He tried to be terse, for there was no time to waste and it took minutes for a message to cross such vast reaches of space. MOST IMPORTANT. WANT ANY AVAILABLE NEWS ON THE LONELY ONE. HIS LAST KNOWN WHEREABOUTS PRESENT POSITION AND ACTIVITIES. ANDERS.

Anders' fingers were lightning fast as he operated the rows of levers controlling exertion. Usually it took a two-man crew to manipulate those shields. He smoked a cigarette as he awaited the answer.

Minutes later it came, transmitted into little electric flashes on the screen above his head. WHAT GOES ON? THAT PIRATE IS OUR MEAT SO HANDS OFF. ESCAPED OUR TRAP TWO WEEKS AGO BUT IS NOW BELIEVED OPERATING FROM SECRET CALLISTO BASE. HE'S OURS! SPURLIN.

Anders leaped for the levers and threw the following message:

THREE DAYS FROM NOW
FLASH NEWS HERE THAT THE
LONELY ONE IS HEADED BELT-
WARD. MUST SOUND AUTHEN-
TIC BUT DO NOT TRANSMIT TO

EARTH HEADQUARTERS. PER-
SONAL FAVOR. E X P L A I N
LATER.

The answer read:

OKAY ANDERS YOU'LL GET
YOUR MESSAGE BUT I HOPE
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DO-
ING AND I'LL WANT THAT EX-
PLANATION. DID I EVER TELL
YOU THE ONE ABOUT—

The little flashes on the screen continued, but Anders didn't stay to watch. He descended the tower stairs and found Lohss, the regular helio man, over in the barracks.

"Okay," he told Lohss. He had explained to him that he was merely making a routine check-up on the equipment. When the message about the Lonely One came he wanted it to be a distinct surprise to every man here.

IT WAS. It came three and a half days later. Lohss shoved excitedly into Anders' little office, waving one of the official helio pads.

"Here's something I thought you ought to see right away, Commander."

Anders read the message:

ATTENTION CERES BASE!
MARS-BOUND FREIGHTER
FROM GANYMEDE MINES
RAMMED AND LOOTED. HANDI-
WORK OF THE LONELY ONE. HE
IS HEADING TOWARD THE
ASTEROIDS. SOLID BLACK
ONE-MAN CRUISER AS USUAL.
FULL ARMAMENT. GET BUSY
AND GOOD LUCK!

Anders smiled to himself and was grateful to Spurlin over on Ganymede for coming through so nicely.

Soon Ceres Base was ringing with the news. Every man there had dreamed of being some day sent on the

Lonely One mission. To bring in that famous pirate would be a feather in anyone's cap, and would mean immediate promotion. Consequently it was with mumblings of displeasure that the men saw Jim Skeel stalk arrogantly into Commander Anders' office.

"Good morning, sir. You sent for me?"

"I did, Skeel. I guess you've heard the news about the Lonely One. Want to make a try for him? Just the job for you." The tinge of contempt in Anders' voice didn't go unnoticed.

Nor did the little hint of cunning that he couldn't keep out of his eyes. Skeel said:

"You never were anxious to send me out before, Commander. This couldn't be some plan of yours to get rid of me?" He smiled a little but there was no humor in it.

"It doesn't matter this time, Skeel. There's a dead or alive warrant on the Lonely One. But I don't mind telling you this is the chance I've been waiting for! You're a killer and so is the Lonely One. I'll be praying that he gets you first, so the Patrol will be rid of scum like you."

Skeel's eyes narrowed. "When do I leave?"

"Soon's you can get your cruiser ready. You're sure you want to handle this alone? You can select a crew, up to six men."

Skeel laughed aloud. "Do you think any of 'em would ride with me? Don't worry, Anders, I'll bring back the Lonely One—alive."

"You needn't pretend with me any more, Skeel."

"Very well, sir. Goodbye."

"Goodbye—but not good luck." Anders ignored the proffered hand. Skeel stiffened, then turned and strode for the door, exiting quickly.

Anders sank back in his chair, pro-

cured a cigarette and lit it thoughtfully. Now the doubts were beginning to crowd in. Nadia Miller had been overwrought and full of revenge. Suppose she did know the asteroids as well as she knew her own library? Skeel did, too, and he was ruthless and cunning. Suppose she did have the fastest cruiser this side of Mars? Skeel was the best solo spaceman in the Patrol.

Anders viciously ground out the burning end of his cigarette. He thought of Nadia Miller's tense but pretty face again, her trim figure and bright hair and hard blue eyes that he wanted to see soft. If anything happened to that girl—

But there was nothing he could do now. Nothing, except face an agony of waiting.

CHAPTER III

JIM SKEEL leaped to his controls, as the Visipanel came to life with a tiny gash of flame that tore a hole in the blackness of space. That would be the Lonely One again! Feverishly he changed his course in a sharp parabola toward the rocket blasts far ahead.

He would keep that ship within range this time! Reaching to the V-panel, he twisted the magnifying dial. The blackness swam and expanded. The tiny orange rocket blasts seemed to leap backward at him. He had to look closely to distinguish the outline of the ship, but then he grunted with satisfaction. It was the solid black solo cruiser, all right. It bore absolutely no insignia, strictly against the Space Code.

Skeel grinned through his weariness. For more than twenty hours he had played hide and seek with that elusive black cruiser. He could never quite get within beam range, and sometimes he lost it out of his V-panel altogether.

Once it had led him straight into the Kennison Group of asteroids, a vast expanse of treacherous rocks with wild, eccentric orbits. This was sheer suicide for cruisers as tiny as theirs, minus the repulsion plates to shunt the rock masses from them. Skeel, in a cold sweat of horror, had finally given up the chase. He had laboriously circled the entire Kennison Group, and now—

Now he had picked up the Lonely One again! He couldn't deny a thrill of admiration as he realized the black ship must have threaded its way *entirely through* the Kennison Group! Well, he would not lose it again. It was still out of beam range but he should be able to keep it centered in his V-panel.

Skeel threw over the lever feeding his tubes full blast. He exulted at the new fierce surge of power as his ship leaped ahead. *But this time the Lonely One didn't try to outrace him!* The black ship came nearer and nearer. Skeel's eyes narrowed. The pirate was supposed to have a much faster ship than his! Could this be some trick? He twisted the magnifying dial again, bringing his quarry more sharply into focus.

Then Skeel laughed aloud, laughed exultantly as he saw the reason for the other's lack of speed. The black cruiser was limping along on but four rocket tubes! Two other tubes, on the starboard side, were smashed and mangled hopelessly. Apparently the pirate hadn't come through that asteroid swarm unscathed after all!

THIS was the break for which Skeel had been waiting. Calmly now with deadly precision he sighted his forward electro-gun control. His fingers leaped to the distance gauge and set the charge to its fullest power. He heard the increasing whine of the coils. Still his gaze was riveted on the V-panel

dial, watching the rapidly diminishing distance. Two hundred miles. One hundred. Fifty. There! Electro-beams were deadly at that distance. He glanced at the sights, saw they were perfect . . . and depressed the forward electro-button.

A crackling, radiant blue beam lashed from the prow of his craft and seemed to uncoil across the miles of space. Simultaneously a little bubble of color leaped backward from the pirate cruiser. Swift as light it came, expanding into a huge sphere of crimson. Skeel's electro-beam struck the sphere. It burst in a corruscating riot of writhing sparks that leaped back along the beam, devouring it hungrily.

Skeel's hand darted out to shut off the power. It was too late. The electro-gun coils burst from their housing in a shower of incandescent wire and metal, as a strong smell of ozone pervaded the ship. Skeel cursed in pain, clapping a hand to his arm where a white-hot strand of wire had struck.

"So that's that!" he gritted fiercely. "Not close enough yet to use the Tynyte bombs." There was nothing to do now but continue the chase, and Skeel saw that it wouldn't last long. Indirectly ahead was a bright dot of sunlight which must have been an asteroid of considerable size. The pirate ship was veering, limping toward it on crippled rockets. Skeel followed, closing in fast. He was sure of his quarry now! When it came to close combat on these big rocks, he was a past master.

The rock loomed up. It was a big one all right, nearly twenty miles in diameter with dangerous plateaus and ugly serrated cliffs reaching up. The pirate seemed in pell-mell panic now. The black ship swung in perilously near, made one complete circuit of the rock and landed on a tiny plateau with

a shallow sweep that must have sheared part of the under-hull away! Skeel brought his own cruiser down with ease, several hundred yards distant.

Even as he was adjusting his helmet and gravity plates, he glimpsed a space-suited figure leaping away from the black ship. Skeel exited quickly, snatched out his electro-pistol and took careful aim. He fired.

The distance was a little too great. The beam hacked down, cutting a shallow path in the rock immediately behind the running figure. The figure looked back but didn't stop running. Skeel grunted and went leaping after it in long swinging strides. He was very casual and confident now. This was all so familiar. . . .

Familiar? It was *too* darned familiar! Skeel stopped and shielded his eyes against the surface glare of sunlight. He stared at the low line of cliffs toward which the figure was running. A strange, insistent hammering seemed to pound away at Skeel's brain. And then, with a little thrill he knew! This was the same asteroid where he had chased his last quarry, in circumstances very similar to this! Those might be the very cliffs where he had killed young—what was his name? Didn't matter now.

Skeel leaped forward again. For a moment he kept the figure in sight, then it seemed to dissolve in the sunlight and disappear. That puzzled him, until he came very close and saw a little cave mouth in the bosom of the cliff. It was there his quarry had fled. Skeel chuckled deep in his throat. He loosened the gun in his belt. Swell! It was as good as over now. Whenever he got *this* close to the victim he stuck with it to the finish.

ing in his corded hand. A narrow passage seemed to lead slightly downward. Far along it he saw a dim light glow that was not sunlight.

He made his way carefully toward that phenomenon. Soon the sides of the rocky cave were sprinkled with little flat creatures about the size of a silver dollar. They were miniature beacons, exuding light through their tenuous, transparent surfaces! Yet it wasn't phosphorescence. Skeel stopped to examine one of them. It was more like actual sunlight, but there was no heat. He touched one of them gingerly, the light immediately went out and it became the same gray color of the stone to which it clung.

Skeel plunged on. Soon the walls became thick with the blazing things. But as he ran by, the vibration of his leaden shoes seemed to frighten them. They blinked off, buge patches of them, remaining gray and quiescent 'til he had passed. Then they came on again. As a result he was running in a constant little patch of darkness, with light ahead and light behind, but always darkness where the reverberation of his pounding feet frightened the button-lichen things.

The tunnel turned and twisted, and several other large ones branched from it. There was no further sight of his quarry. Skeel moved more slowly now. He clicked on his helmet radio but heard no sound of receding feet. Nevertheless he knew his quarry had passed this way not many minutes before, because a few of the light-creatures ahead of him were blinking on again laggardly. Grim-lipped now, a weapon in hand, Skeel pressed on a little more slowly and watched and listened.

He stopped in a dim little grotto where three tunnel mouths gaped. He hesitated, then chose the tunnel to the

SKEEL stood just within the darkened cave, listening, pistol clutch-

left and proceeded along it with infinite caution. Still there was no sign his quarry had come this way. Skeel suddenly realized he had acted with foolhardy recklessness. This might be a trap! He started to turn back.

"Stand right where you are!"

THE words rasped through his helmet phones and echoed in his ears. Something jabbed into his ribs with a viciousness that made him grunt.

Skeel slowly raised his arms but the voice rasped again:

"Don't raise your hands! Drop them to your side. Slowly! That's it. Now drop your gun."

Skeel did so. The figure behind him swooped and picked it up.

"Now you can turn around."

Skeel did that too, then expressed himself in three thunderous words.

"Blazes! A female!"

"Sure. But don't let it give you ideas." She stepped back a pace keeping the two pistols carefully centered on him.

"A trick!" bellowed Skeel. "This is Anders' work, I might have known it!"

"No. It's my work." Her voice was soft in the phones and her smile beneath the helmet was hardly a smile; it showed teeth, but they were no more gleaming than the ice-hard gleam in her blue eyes. "My work," she repeated. "And now that you know I'm not the Lonely One, I shall tell you who I really am. The name's Nadia Miller."

She saw the dawn of realization in his eyes.

"Miller," she said again slowly, savoring the word. "My brother was Arnold Miller—the man you killed."

"Look here, Miss Miller, I'm afraid you've got this figured out wrong. I knew your brother, sure. I was after him. But I didn't kill him, he fell off—"

"He fell off a cliff. I don't doubt it, after you got through with him." She gestured imperatively with the gun in her right hand. "All right, walk ahead of me. Move!"

Skeel shrugged and obeyed, watching the clusters of light-creatures blink off at the reverberation of their steps. For five minutes they continued in silence, in their continuous little patch of darkness. They made several turns as the tunnel angled sharply. Finally Skeel said:

"Where are you taking me?"

"Out to your Patrol cruiser. There you'll sign a written confession or I'll kill you. I almost hope you'll refuse to sign it."

"We won't get out of here at this rate! I'm afraid you made a wrong turn to the left back there."

"I don't think so. Just keep moving, because if I bump into you one of these pistols might go off."

SKEEL cursed but kept moving, because she sounded as though she meant it.

"That was a neat trick of yours," he said, "coming clear through that rogue group of asteroids."

"I thought so. Of course, I hoped you'd follow me and never come out of there."

"Kind of a risky chance to take, wasn't it?"

"It was worth it—even if it didn't work out."

"I don't think this'll work out either. We're going in the wrong direction, back into the cliff instead of out."

"Just keep moving."

They walked on.

She called a stop at the next intersection, where a much narrower passage came into theirs at a sharp angle. She hesitated, looking around.

"I told you," Skeel chuckled.

"You're lost. You made two wrong turns, but luckily for us I noticed them. Want me to go back and show you?"

"No! Keep moving straight ahead." She didn't sound very confident.

This time Skeel didn't move. "Listen," he said grimly. "Do you realize it'll soon be night out there? Maybe it's come already!"

"Well?"

"Well!" he repeated in amazement, whirling to face her in the dim light. "Do you mean to say you aren't familiar with a night on an asteroid? Especially a lone one this big?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when night comes on these big rocks, strange things come out to greet it; creatures that stir and scramble out of the crevices, tentacular things that hate the sunlight but come out in the dark and are plenty dangerous! Usually the dark side of an asteroid is thick with 'em. This is one such asteroid. I've been here before."

"You can't frighten me." But her little gasp belied the words. "Anyway, I've made up my mind. We'll wait until morning."

N o w h e laughed. "Morning? That'll be ten hours from now. This planet has a very slow axial rotation. Know how much oxygen we have left in these tanks? About four hours' worth. We haven't time to stand here talking. I'm going to try to make it back out to the cruiser. You can do as you please."

Ignoring the weapons in her hands, Skeel strode past her. She hesitated a split second, then followed. She knew he was right about the oxygen, but wondered how much of the rest he was making up, trying to trick her. Anyway, so long as she still had the weapons. . . .

SKEEL had been right. He made several turns and the route led gradually upward. She felt foolish for not having thought of that herself. Presently Skeel called:

"There we are!"

Peering past him, she glimpsed a little circle of light that was the cave entrance. Skeel raced forward. She quickly followed. The entrance loomed before them, but they stopped abruptly. Between them and the outside surface was a dark stretch of tunnel. Beyond it they could plainly see the wide rocky terrain, and the bluish-silver glint of the Patrol cruiser resting in pale sunlight. But night had already come. The ebon shadow of the cliff was creeping slowly out, swallowing up everything. It had almost reached the cruiser.

"It's too late," Skeel groaned. "We're stuck here now!"

She suddenly knew there was no trickery in this. "There's still time! Run for it!"

"No! . . . Mechanically Skeel's hand darted out to stop her. But already she was past him, hurrying down the last part of the tunnel.

Skeel followed slowly, knowing she wouldn't go far. His sharp eyes had glimpsed something she had not yet seen; shapeless, writhing masses surging toward them in the darkness. He was right behind her when she screamed. Several tentacular things had reared up to claw blindly at her face-plate. She screamed, staggered backward into Skeel and half raised her hand holding an electro-pistol. But before she could fire, her legs seemed turned into rubber and she fainted in a heap at Skeel's feet.

"Thought so," Skeel grunted. "You can only go so far on raw nerve, then it lets you down." He dragged her back several yards into the artificial

light. Her hands still held tightly to the pistols. Skeel smiled grimly, reached slowly down and took both weapons.

SHE swam up out of a sea of darkness.

A blaze of light hurt her eyes. Sitting up, she saw she was still in the cave, at a place where the button-light creatures were thickest.

A short distance away at the edge of the darkness Skeel was crouched, peering. Presently he came back to her.

"Hello, Miller. I was just taking a survey of our little pets out there. The place is lousy with 'em but don't worry, they won't come too near this light."

She got to her feet hurriedly and eyed the two weapons in his belt. "I might have known you'd take advantage—"

"What do you expect? I can't afford to be running around on an asteroid with an armed woman at my heels."

She looked past him into the darkness. "Doesn't look as if we're going to do any more running."

"That's right, lady, it doesn't. We're in a pretty bad spot." He drew one of the pistols. "So you may as well have this." He tossed it to her and she caught it deftly.

"Thanks," she said dryly. "Now how do you know I won't kill you with it? That's what I came out here to do, you know."

"Uh-huh, but you won't. Know why? The vibration of that beam would turn out every light in this cave, and the night things would come rushing in."

She nodded, knowing he was perfectly right. "Stalemate, is it? Okay, Jim Skeel. But if we never get out of here I shall kill you at the very last moment. I'll never let those night beasts deprive me of the pleasure."

Skeel grinned. She was getting her nerve back again! The more he saw

of this girl the more he liked her. He liked the determined curve of her orchid-pale chin, the tight slash of her lips and the courage that gleamed behind a false hardness in her eyes. He shrugged. "Four more hours of oxygen. I suggest you regulate the flow to two-thirds and breathe shallowly. That'll give you a few hours more," he spoke quietly.

"No. If I can't find a way out of here in four hours— Well, I won't sit here and wait for the end. I'm going to explore. Coming?"

"I guess so," Skeel agreed. "Not that I think we'll find another exit, for we won't. But walking helps me to think, and I know there must be a way out of this!"

CHAPTER IV

THEY walked side by side in silence, entered joining tunnels and adjacent caves but were careful to remember the way back. Everywhere the walls were lighted by the button-creatures but nowhere was there an entrance to the outside. Not that it would do them any good. They both realized that now. The night horrors would be out there everywhere, waiting for new victims.

"You said walking helped you to think," she said dully. "Are you thinking?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

He stopped, turned suddenly to face her. She was startled by a new perplexed look on his face.

"I've been thinking things over from the beginning," Skeel said gruffly. "You say you came out here to kill me. You've had plenty of chance."

"But I didn't, and you can't understand it. There is a code, after all. I understand now what Com-

mander Anders meant." She spoke softly, almost to herself. They walked in silence for a minute then she added as an afterthought:

"You had your chance, too. Back there when I fainted—"

"Do you think," Skeel almost snarled, "I'd fire an electro-beam here in the caves, where these light-creatures mean our very lives?"

"There are other ways." She looked steadily at him. "You might have opened all my oxygen tanks."

"Didn't think of it." He turned his face away abruptly. "Quit bothering me, I'm still trying to think."

"You can think later," she was insistent. "Tell me one thing, Skeel. What made you turn killer? You once had the best record in the Patrol!"

"I'm still the best man in the Patrol!"

"No you're not, Skeel."

"Damn you, I——" He stopped. Then in a voice scarcely audible: "I have a reason. I've never told my story to anyone."

"You almost told Anders. I was in his office that day."

"Anders is a fool!"

"I'd like you to tell me." There was a way she said it, a certain tone in her voice that hinted of feeling. Perhaps even, of understanding.

HE was suddenly speaking, pouring out his story in a fierce rush of words as if he wanted to finish before that awful throbbing pain came again.

"It was in the early days when the Mars mines were opening. Lawless, bloody days. The Patrol received news that a freighter was being looted just a few hours from Earth. We got out there fast—too fast. Sixteen of us. The pirates hadn't yet left the drifting hulk. We walked into an ambush and there was nothing to do but give up without a struggle. They re-

moved our weapons, then without warning began burning us down with electros. I dropped and played dead, while all about me my friends were really dying! It was all over in seconds, but I can still hear their dying screams and the hiss of the electros.

"I think something snapped inside of me. I was in a mental hospital for days. When I came out I swore a terrible oath. I swore to avenge my fifteen friends, to the last man! Any criminal would serve the purpose. There was a bitter hatred in me for all of them. I guess you know the rest. Since then I've always worked alone, and I've never given any criminal quarter. I've killed, yes. Fourteen times. I've almost reached my goal!"

He stopped, and her eyes were steadily upon him. "But will that be the end, Jim Skeel?"

He didn't answer.

"I remember something Anders said that day—"

"I remember it too!" he whispered. "God knows I remember, and it's haunted me ever since. He said any normal man would squirm at the thing I'd done! Your brother, Miss Miller—he was innocent—but God help me, I feel no remorse! For the very first time, this thing frightens me!"

He expected her to answer—to say something, anything—but she was silent. For a long time Skeel sat motionless on the floor of the cave, fists pressed hard against his temples.

Nadia glanced up at the little dial above her eyes, inside the oxygen helmet. "Less than three hours now," she announced.

Skeel rose to his feet. "Come on," he said calmly. "I know the way out now."

"Out of these caves, do you mean?" Again her eyes were upon him steadily, those blue eyes that held something less

than a crystal hardness now.

Skeel looked away. "Yes," he said. "Yes, that's what I mean."

THEY WALKED back to the cave entrance where the darkness surged in. But Skeel stopped just short of it. Approaching the cave wall, he touched one of the hutton-creatures. Instantly its light went out. Slowly, gingerly he detached it from the wall. It was rather gelatinous, he noticed, but was equipped with tiny, barely discernible sucker-cups.

Holding the grayish thing in his hand, Skeel approached Nadia and reached out toward her space-suited figure. She shrank back with a little shudder of loathing.

"Hold still!" Skeel demanded. "It's not going to hurt you, and it may save your life!"

He placed it on her shoulder where it remained quiescent for about ten seconds. Then it changed into a little disk of light again, like a miniature beacon.

"You see, it works! I should have thought of this before. Walk around! Your natural stride."

Nadia walked. At her second step the thing blinked off. She waited until it came on again, then carefully tip-toed around the cave. This time the creature's light stayed on.

Skeel nodded. "This isn't going to be fun, but it's the only way! We've got to plaster each other with those things until we become walking pillars of light! Then we'll tip-toe out through the darkness, through those slinking nightmare things until we reach my cruiser. It'll be an ordeal, agony. Think you can do it, Miller?"

She nodded, suppressing a shudder at the thought of those gelatinous blobs covering her body.

"All right," Skeel said. "You go to

work on me first. Place them on my arms, shoulders and torso. But cover every inch! The more light we have, the easier we'll get through those beasts out there."

She went to work, biting her lip every time she touched one of the light-creatures; but before she was through, she had overcome her repugnance. Skeel was soon bathed in a brilliant white halo from the waist up.

"I think I know the secret of these things," Skeel said as he busied himself decorating her. They must come out onto the surface when the sun is there. They store up enough light energy to last them through the dark period. Somehow they assimilate the heat energy. This is cold light." As a finishing touch he placed some of the things in a little crown of light around her helmet.

"Now for the real test," he pronounced grimly. "We'll walk side by side. Don't get nervous, Miller, and above all walk *slowly*, on tip-toe. If these things go out, it's our finish!"

Like figures in a slow-motion film they moved across the cave toward the outer darkness.

IMEDIATELY they knew it was going to be a nightmare of agony. The wall of night seemed to flutter before them and then recede. Receding with the darkness, too, were half-seen grayish shapes close to the ground. But behind and all around them the darkness closed in again. The night creatures closed in too, staying just beyond the little circle of light.

Their tentacles were long and sensitive and reached in close to the ground where the light hardly shone. One of them whipped against Skeel's ankles, and he felt the strength of it. He heard Nadia gasp and knew the same thing had happened to her. But they didn't

stop in their slow, tip-toeing stride.

"Steady!" he warned. "Once we get outside maybe they won't be so thick."

In a few minutes that seemed like hours, they were outside and could see the glint of stars against a cobalt sky. They paused to rest. Their eyes were becoming used to the dark and they could see hordes of the grayish night things surging in toward them.

"Afraid I was wrong," Skeel murmured. "They're worse out here."

"Just so they keep their distance," Nadia shuddered. "If they come any closer, I—I might get panicky and run for it."

"You'd never make it," he warned. They moved on, careful step by step, pushing the darkness back. They made nearly half the distance before their tired muscles forced them to rest again. The surging shapes seemed to be getting bolder. Skeel could feel them all around his feet now. He had to fight the impulse to run, to kick out at them, anything to keep them away. Instead, he bent slowly, reaching out with his blazing arms. The shapes retreated momentarily.

"Afraid we'd better not rest any more," he said. "Come on, we'll try to make it to the cruiser this time." They could see the dark, looming shape of it perhaps a hundred yards away. It seemed like a hundred miles.

Once his left arm bumped into her. Every light-creature on that side blinked off. In about ten seconds they came on again, as he held his arm motionless. He moved a little away, turned his head and looked at her. She was staring straight ahead. He saw her profile beneath the little halo of light around her helmet; that light enhanced every taut little muscle in her face, and Skeel suddenly realized her face was never meant to be drawn up into such a tight, grim mask. She was going along

on raw nerve again. Skeel swore softly beneath his breath, marveling at her.

Strange, too, how swiftly and clearly he could think in all this nightmare slowness and blackness. He had never seen things so clearly before. Never—

His mind came back abruptly as something whipped around his ankles. His feet seemed caught in a net of lashing, spiked tentacles! Slowly, with some effort, he managed to disentangle himself. He took another step forward. His foot came down on something soft and squirmy which lashed up at him. He took a basty step backward, lost his footing and fell prone in utter darkness as every light-button on him blinked out.

FOR a single horrified instant Nadia stood there, despite the tentacles moving around her own feet.

"Keep going!" Skeel grated from the darkness where he lay. "You can make it now, don't mind me!"

But she didn't move, except to lean far over in Skeel's direction. Slowly she lowered herself, so that her entire light-glowing body almost covered his. All the buttons on her right arm blinked out as her hand touched the ground with a slight jar. She prayed that the pounding of her heart wouldn't cause the others to go out! Tensely she propped herself there, scarcely breathing, watching the dim lashing horrors. A dozen tentacles seemed to come from one central body. At the end of each tentacle was a bulbous thing with wiry, waving antennae, and below the antennae were gaping slashes that opened and closed and might have been lips.

With sickening horror she saw some of the bulbous things pounding at Skeel's face-plate. Others tore at his fabricoid suit. Slowly she shifted her weight, brought her left arm around

and moved it toward them. The things retreated from the light slowly. Seconds later Skeel's own light-buttons began flashing on, and he rose gingerly to his feet.

Nadia saw that his face was white. For a moment he stood quite still and stared at her. "That does it," he muttered, but she didn't know what he meant. Carefully now she forged her way ahead. Skeel moved too, ever more slowly, staying always behind her.

The cruiser was scarcely fifty feet ahead, and she had almost reached it. It was now or never, Skeel knew. She would gain the cruiser and blast back to Ceres Base. He had told her his story, confessed to being a killer—the killer of fourteen men! She would take that story back to Ceres Base and they would believe her. There was only one thing to do.

Her voice came to him just then. "Hurry! I think you can run and make it now!"

"No, there's not any hurry. Not now, Miller."

She must have detected some strange note in his voice. She looked back just as he was drawing the electro from his belt. Carefully he raised his arm in a straight line.

Skeel saw the sudden startled look on her white face, he saw her mouth open, but she did not have time to speak.

"I guess this is it, Miller! Number fifteen!" He pulled the trigger and the electro hissed its flame.

THE men at Ceres Base stood in excited little groups near the dome air-lock. Every eye was on the gigantic V-panel that reflected the tiny speck far out in space that was curving in toward them. A solo cruiser, yes—but which one? The black one the girl had

used? Or would this be Skeel returning from another of his murderous missions? Every man there knew about the plot by now.

Anders stood there now, his face a picture of conflicting emotions. A thousand times he had blamed himself for allowing Nadia Miller to go out on that crazy mission! He had lived through a thousand agonies of waiting.

The dot grew larger in the Visipanel and resolved at last into the bluish-silver cruiser of the Space Patrol. Anders' face went suddenly white, then a fever of fury burned through him. If this was Skeel— If Nadia didn't come back—

Minutes later the blue and silver cruiser neared the dome. The lock automatically opened. It swept gracefully in, and powerful magniplates brought it to rest. A figure climbed wearily out and walked toward the men.

"Nadia!" Anders cried, and leaped forward eagerly to help her out of the space suit. "Are you all right? What about Skeel?"

She smiled at him. "Jim Skeel won't come back." Quickly she related the story of the caves and the light-button creatures and their perilous path through the night beasts toward the cruiser.

"Skeel was a changed man in those final minutes," she explained. "He must have known what he was going to do—what he had to do. It was all so deliberate. I had almost reached the cruiser, not realizing he was so far behind me. I turned just in time to see him raise the weapon. He called, 'Number fifteen!' Then he fired."

"Fired at you?" Anders was puzzled.

"No. I thought he meant to. But the beam didn't come within twenty feet of me. He merely fired at random,

and instantly all the light-things on him went out. Then I—I could see those horrible night beasts rushing in—from all sides—waves of them—" She buried her face in her hands, trying to shut out the memory.

"The electro-beam," Anders said musingly. "Yes, that would do it. You fire one of those pistols, especially full power, and it sends a slight electric shock all through you. But Skeel knew that! Why did he do it? If it was to save you, now, I might understand; but you say you had already gained the ship—"

"To save me?" Nadia murmured. "No. I think it was to save himself."

Anders still looked a little puzzled. "But what about your brother? Did Skeel confess anything?"

She looked up and her eyes were shining, but she was not crying. Within her was only a vast, singing quiet too deep for tears.

"My brother, Commander? When you enter that case into the records you might say—you may say, Commander, that my brother was killed when he fell off a cliff."

THE END

AN EXPERT ON MAGNETICS

CHARLES AUGUSTIN COULOMB was born at Angoulême, France, on June 14, 1736. After receiving a good education in the fundamentals he entered military life and became an officer in the engineering corps of the army. He spent nine years in the West Indies and then returned to France with his health much impaired. In 1789, on the outbreak of the Revolution, he retired to a small estate at Blois and devoted himself to scientific research. In 1802 he was appointed an inspector of public instruction; he died in Paris on August 23, 1806.

Becoming interested in the phenomena of magnetism and electricity, Coulomb studied the literature of those rapidly growing departments of science, and in 1777 was awarded a prize for an essay on the construction of magnetic needles. In 1779 he gained another, for a monograph on the theory of prime movers, and in 1781 a third for a paper on the subject of friction. These so established his reputation as a scientist of ability, that he was elected a member of the French Academy of Sciences, and called upon to solve a number of difficult problems in mechanical engineering.

His great accomplishment was that of the adaptation of the torsion balance (designed by John Mitchell, and perfected by Henry Cavendish, and employed by the latter to measure the force of gravitation), to the measurement of the strength and action of magnetic poles. For this purpose a long and thin magnet was suspended at its central point on a fine wire, the torsional capacity of which had been previously determined, so that it could revolve freely in either a horizontal or vertical plane. A similar magnet, suspended at one of its ends, was then placed near one of the poles of the other. The strength of the reaction resulting could then be determined by noting the angle

through which it was necessary to turn the head screw carrying the wire for the horizontally disposed magnet, to maintain it in its original position. For this service to science, his name was adopted by the International Scientific Association, as the unit of that quantity of electricity which passes through a conductor of unit size in a second of time, an honor which will keep his memory alive as long as the electrical science endures.

Coulomb published papers on friction as applied to machinery; on windmills, and on the torsional elasticity of metal and silk fibres. His electrical papers were published between 1785 and 1789; these formed the basis of the mathematical theory of electricity of Poisson. In these memoirs Coulomb gave an account of his work with the torsion balance in verifying Priestley's law of electrical repulsions. He extended the case to include attractions and finally stated that the force is proportional to the product of the charges and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. He also verified the inverse square law for particles of magnetic fluid; he believed in the two-fluid theory, but assumed that the magnetic fluids could not be separated but that the electric fluids were separable. In the fourth memoir Coulomb showed that an electric charge is confined to the surface of a conductor and he compared the distribution of charge on the surface of conductors. He virtually established the result that the electric force near a conductor is proportional to the surface density of electrification (this was later proved by Poisson); he also stated that in the case of action at a distance the intervening medium played no part. Cavendish had anticipated Coulomb in the statement of the inverse law, but this work was unpublished until many years after his death.—S. Lywa.

There is the microscope was beauty—and Alvin Camp could not resist its emotional impact.



LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

By FRANCIS M. DEEGAN

"**A**S A MATTER of fact," said Alvin Camp primly, "I am not interested in isolating the various parts of matter. It is my theory that matter can be disintegrated in such a way that it retains all its original elements, even when reduced to an infinitesimal degree."

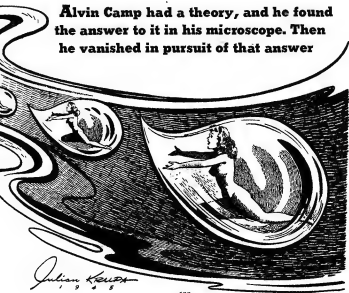
"I can see no practical purpose in that," I retorted grimly. "Nor was it my understanding that these experiments of yours were to take such a fanciful turn. I am interested in your principle of disintegration solely as a faster method for analytical research. I have yet to see a report from you on your progress. I am forced to conclude that you are merely playing around with the expensive equipment I have

provided. Unless I have a concise report in the next ten days, I shall appoint a committee of experts to investigate, and possibly take over the experiments."

"Oh, you mustn't do that," said Alvin vaguely. "It's quite revolutionary—what I'm doing. You'll see."

That was all the satisfaction I could get out of him. It was very depressing. The Arts and Sciences Club was fairly deserted on that gray November day. Alvin Camp was at no time a convivial companion. And on this occasion I was thoroughly exasperated with him. Since it was my money which was financing his work, I felt that I was entitled to share some interest in it. But on the rare occasions when I had

Alvin Camp had a theory, and he found the answer to it in his microscope. Then he vanished in pursuit of that answer



been able to trap him outside his laboratory, he merely mumbled vague theories and peered at me anxiously through his glasses.

He was still a young man, not more than thirty, but already he had that frail, stooped appearance of an elderly scholar. He got to his feet now in that fumbling, uncertain way he had, and stared out the window.

"It looks," he said, "like it might snow. And I used to think that was beautiful—snow."

Since it had been snowing for the past three days, I merely grunted and watched him wander out toward the coat room. I hoped he wouldn't get snowbound and freeze to death before he reached the old manor in the suburbs where he lived with his spinster sister, and conducted his alleged experiments in the modern laboratory I had set up. I rang for a drink and a pad of paper and began to list the names of possible candidates for the committee which would take over the experimental laboratory in ten days' time.

Long before the ten days were up, however, I had a phone call from Alvin Camp's sister. She was highly excited and about all I could make out of her babbling was the fact that Alvin had disappeared. She seemed to be blaming me for his absence, although I kept assuring her that I did not have Alvin, nor did I have any knowledge of his whereabouts. Unable to quiet her in any other way, I finally agreed to drive out to the house. I was concerned, in any case, about the equipment. If Alvin had chosen to disappear, he might have taken part of that with him.

MISS SARAH CAMP resembled her brother. Her tall, spare frame was quivering with indignation when she admitted me to the gloomy old house. She opened the attack at once.

"It's your fault, Mr. Blaming!" she declared bitterly. "You're nothing but a big, greedy industrialist! You couldn't wait for Alvin to complete his experiments. Oh, I know how you kept after him! Always pushing him. Threatening to take his laboratory away from him. Now you've pushed him too far. He's gone!"

"So you told me," I said calmly. "Although you were not very explicit about the time or manner of his leaving, I hardly think we need give ourselves up to despair—just yet. I don't suppose he took any of the laboratory equipment with him?"

She gave me an odd, faintly contemptuous stare. "I only wish he had!" she said harshly. "Go and see for yourself. I want nothing to do with that devil's paraphernalia."

The spacious laboratory was housed in a concrete addition at the rear of the house. The overhead fluorescent lights were on, and the place looked as if Alvin had just stepped out for a few moments with the intention of returning shortly. I hesitated, stepped back into the dark hall, and called to Miss Camp.

"When did you say he—er, disappeared?"

"I didn't say," she shrilled back at me. "Because I don't know! He went to the laboratory after lunch yesterday. And I haven't seen him since. It's your fault!"

Since there was no outside exit from the laboratory, I concluded that Alvin had walked out the front door of the house without his sister's knowledge. He was no doubt mooning about somewhere in that vague way of his, indulging his pretty theories. I glanced at some scraps of paper on a work bench, and cursed myself once more for the moment of weakness which had prompted me to finance this light-

headed dreamer.

"Perfection," Alvin had written, "*is the sum of many small elements beautifully conceived and carefully executed. And the ultimate perfection is achieved when those elements are reduced to the infinitesimal limit. There is such beauty as man has never dared to dream of—if I can only reach it in time.*"

"Nonsense!" I snorted angrily, and glared around the empty laboratory. "So this is what I've been paying out good money for!"

I crossed the room to the giant microscope and peered at the slide fixed under the lenses. There was an odd blur of colors and a faint movement. I walked around the machine and stared down at the slide, but I could see nothing at all with the naked eye. Nothing, that is, except a plain glass slide with a slight trace of what had been moisture of some kind. Once more I peered through the lenses. There was undoubtedly movement. Carefully I adjusted the lenses. The colors became sharper, began to take form, like small, beautifully carved jewels. The movements became clearer and I stared in a kind of fascinated horror.

A pair of white, exquisite arms were extended pleadingly, and fell back in a gesture of despair. Then slowly through the jeweled columns a body appeared, languidly, but with such grace as I had never seen in mortal woman. For it was a woman, perfectly formed, seeming to float there under the microscope, her pitch black hair trailing after her, and her limpid, dark eyes raised listlessly. Her red lips were parted, gasping, and it was that which tore at my heart. She was in terrible distress, pleading with me to help her, and there was nothing under Heaven that I could do. Except to stare at her in her agony. Her head fell

back and her lovely eyes closed in hopeless resignation. I groaned and tore myself away from the microscope.

THE blood was pounding in my ears as I looked frantically about the laboratory. There must be some clue, some explanation of this fiendish experiment Alvin Camp had so heartlessly left. There must be some way to help that exquisite creature!

I pawed through the papers on his work bench. To my frenzied eyes, they all appeared to be covered with disjointed and seemingly irrelevant remarks, similar to the one I had previously read. Suddenly my eye was caught by my own name, scribbled in the margin of one sheet of paper. *Convince Henry Blaining of this,*" said the pencil scrawl. *"Otherwise no hope of new equipment."*

From the partially incomprehensible hieroglyphics on the paper, it appeared that his theory of disintegration also included the possibility of reassembling matter in its original form. At the moment I was too much upset by the condition of the beauty under the microscope to rail at this additional insanity of Alvin's. Why bother with the process of disintegration if he merely intended to put the thing back together again? At the bottom of the paper was a notation: "*See Journal, Sept. 5.*"

Desperately I began searching for the journal, in the hope that he had put down a more coordinated record of his experiments. I interrupted my search only once to gaze through the microscope. My poor little beauty was lying there, pale and exhausted. Only the delicate movement of her breasts indicated that she was still breathing. As I slid off the stool before the microscope, a heavy object thudded to the floor. I picked it up and swore loudly.

It was the journal. Hastily I thumbed the pages to find the last entry.

"There is no help for it," Alvin had written the day before. "I shall never be able to convince that tight-fisted fool, Henry Blaining, of the value of reassembling matter as expounded in my entry of September 5, this year. He will never agree to furnish the equipment for additional experiments. I'm sure of it now. He is totally unsympathetic toward my theory of reduction to perfection. He is concerned only with the destruction of matter. He believes it should be split up into separate ugly parts, and classified, like hardware. He is a cold-hearted bone-head. I shall have nothing more to do with him. I have made my decision. There will be no returning—thanks to Henry Blaining. But I console myself with this thought. Even if I had been given the opportunity of perfecting my theory of reassembling matter, the task would have been long and tedious, and I should have to rely upon other minds and hands to bring me back, perhaps imperfectly. No. Once I have achieved such a close approach to perfection, surely I shall not want to return to this chumsy, gross existence. My Nereid smiles and beckons to me through the microscope. I have fixed the rubber to the overhead tank. The Disinteg-Ray is set, the volume indicator shows a steady rise. In half an hour I shall lie down under the ray and be blasted into perfection. With the addition of my disintegrated cells the fluid in the tank will rise, the seepage will flow through the rubber tube and wash the microscopic slide. As the fluid in the tank is lowered the mouth of the tube will sink with it until the tank is drained . . ."

I STARED upward at the porcelain tank which was a part of the intri-

cate ray machine. A slender rubber tube was suspended from the top of the tank and led downward to the microscope. I climbed the steel ladder swiftly and looked into the tank. It was half full of a clear liquid with a faint greenish tinge, like water. Just inside the lip of the tank the rubber tube had become twisted in a tight kink, probably from the force of the disintegrator blast. I straightened it carefully, made sure the seepage had begun and slid pell-mell down the ladder.

With my eye glued to the microscope, I watched a strange thing take place. The slow, tiny drops coming from the end of the tube flooded the glass slide, bringing more of the brilliant, jewel-like objects that surrounded my dying beauty. These were no longer fixed in place, but began moving gracefully in a kind of rhythmic pattern, always changing, always beautiful. At last my ethereal little creature stirred. Her lovely hands fluttered, the white lids lifted to disclose luminous eyes that gazed straight at me, and she smiled a slow, grateful smile that pierced my heart with such a gladness as I had never known.

I sat there entranced, content to gaze my fill at such perfect beauty as man had surely never before imagined possible. Slowly she turned away from me and held out her slender white arms, and from among the jewel patterns another figure appeared, a slender, wonderfully formed male figure. When it came, the blow to my heart was almost too much. I had been totally unprepared for this. That my own perfect beauty should have a mate. He held her in his arms and turned to face me, and I was filled with a murderous, impotent rage. The features were unmistakable. They were the highly idealized features of Alvin Camp. And he was laughing at me.

"No!" I roared, stumbling away from the microscope. "He can't do this to me! I'll—I'll exterminate him——"

I looked about for a deadly instrument. Anything to annihilate—No, no. That wouldn't do. He had already disintegrated himself. I snatched at the journal and searched for the September 5 entry. Bring him back! That was it. And never mind if I couldn't put him back together the way he belonged. The entry for September 5 had been torn out of the journal. There was no trace of the theory he had evolved for reassembling matter. Cursing, I forced myself to gaze through the microscope again. God help me! Alvin Camp and the gorgeous Nereid had multiplied with the increased liquid. There were dozens of them, blissfully entwined in their beautiful world. At last I began to understand. Disintegration. Reduction to infinitesimal perfection. There would be hundreds, thousands, millions of Alvin Camps, repeating *ad infinitum* this ecstatic existence he had chosen.

For one mad moment I stared at the Disinteg-Ray machine. And then my cold, practical mind reasserted itself. It would be utterly ridiculous to hope

to operate the thing successfully. Alvin had furnished no reports on his work, and though I had requested it many times, he had also failed to draw up the manual of instructions for operating his equipment.

Helplessly I paced up and down the laboratory and watched the tank empty. The liquid flowed evenly across the glass slide into a narrow trough which in turn emptied down the drain set in the floor. There was nothing I could do. Any attempt to injure Alvin would affect that incredible feminine beauty. It was dark when I left the laboratory. I turned out the lights and locked the door. My heart was heavy with a grief such as no mortal woman could have inspired. It was so completely hopeless.

The strange disappearance of Alvin Camp has never been explained officially. It is generally agreed that he is a damn fool, wherever he is, to have given up such a promising opportunity. There are a few who contend that he committed suicide under the stress of hard work. The fellow was unquestionably a fool, but every time I look out at Lake Michigan I think of him, and I envy him.

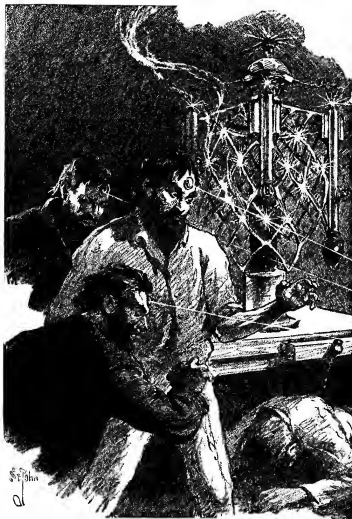
COMING NEXT ISSUE **ATOM WAR**

A TRUE STORY OF THE NEXT WAR!

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Everybody is wondering about the atom bomb. What will it mean to Mankind? What will it mean to the next war. Will there be a next war? Here is the stunning answer, told in fiction, to be sure, but told with TRUTH in every line of it.

DON'T MISS IT—PLEASE!



Four Who Returned

By CHESTER S. GEIER

What will happen to the first men to travel to another planet? What will they be like when they return?

LIGHT glowed behind the plastic insets of Rowe's door. I paused on my way out of the office, surprised that he had stayed so late. I'd thought those estimates had kept me so long after everyone else had gone home. On a sudden impulse, I walked

over and knocked.

"Come in." It was his voice, with that toneless, tired quality which had become all too familiar to me.

Rowe was seated at his desk, elbows on its untidy, littered surface, shaggy head held in his hands. He peered up

Death leaped like lightning from the weird jewel in their foreheads



at me from beneath grizzled, thick brows.

"Oh . . . Herb. Just leaving?" He sat back in his chair, and from the stiff, slow way he did so, I realized he'd held his brooding posture a long time before my entrance.

I nodded. "It's late, Frank. All the others have gone home." I looked at him a moment in silence. "Frank, you're eating your heart out again. Aren't you ever going to snap out of it?"

"I don't know," Rowe said. He rubbed the back of a gnarled hand across his forehead and sighed. "I was wondering, Herb. . . . Mars is passing out of conjunction again, and I was wondering. . . ."

"You've been wondering for seven years now," I told him. "Seven years, Frank. After all that time, there just can't be any hope. You've got to forget the *Spaceward*."

"Forget?" Rowe almost shouted. The deep lines of his face twisted into an expression of anguish. "Forget the fifteen years I spent designing and perfecting the ship. Forget the men who rode her? Forget Jimmy?" He jerked out of his chair and strode to the windows behind his desk, where he stood looking out into the deepening dusk.

I stared at his back, somewhat stunned at the blaze of emotion I'd evoked. I'd known how he felt over the loss of the *Spaceward* and all the men in her, including his own son, Jimmy, but I hadn't guessed, after seven years, that his feeling still ran so deep.

I looked at him with a new depth of perception. He stood at the windows, his shaggy head bowed. For the first time I became fully aware that his hair was almost white, and that his powerful, short figure had thickened, become stooped. And for the first time I be-

came fully aware that he was old—old and unhappy.

Through the windows, the neon sign at the gate was visible, that familiar sign which read: "Rowe Rocketcraft. Main Plant." And I could see part of the plant buildings, their sprawling bulks becoming indistinct in the gathering darkness. Against these outward evidences of success, Rowe stood as a symbol of futility; for without happiness, there can be no real success.

I thought of the long years of work and hope and aspiration that lay behind Rowe, and I was saddened to think, as far as his own life was concerned, how utterly they had been wasted. To the world, of course, he was success personified, for already the rockets which he had designed and built were beginning to roar through the tenuous reaches of the stratosphere, linking the farthest corners of the earth by a few hours' flight. In history he would go down as the inventor of the first successful rocket motor, builder of the first space vessel to leave Earth. But with regard to Jimmy, the one person who had mattered most to him, I knew he would always feel that he had failed.

My sympathy was all the keener for having been with Rowe through all those lean and struggling years during which he'd fought his rocket motor to perfection. I'd seen my savings vanish, as his had vanished long before, into the hungry maw of those early experiments. And my faith in him had never wavered, even after the last cent had gone and success was still only a dim hope. I had gone out, and by miracles over which I have not yet ceased to be astonished, I had hedged and borrowed more. Nor had my faith been displaced; it was a far cry from those days as Rowe's business manager when there had been no business at all to manage, to the present, as partner in an indus-

try worth many millions.

THE interim had not been an easy one. Rowe had looked ahead with the eyes of a dreamer; stratosphere rockets were only the first step in his plans. Even while I fought to interest a doubting world in the first flimsy rocket planes, he had begun work on the *Spaceward*. And followed fifteen years of juggling a lean balance between the fledgling industry on the one hand and the seemingly insatiable demands of Rowe's experiments on the other. But in the end, and at the cost of many gray hairs and many sleepless nights, I'd seen things safely through; the *Spaceward* had become a reality, and the fledgling was well on its way to becoming a colossus.

Rowe turned from the window; his gray eyes met mine briefly, then glanced away. "Forgive me for snapping at you, Herb. I realize you meant well." He took a deep breath and shrugged. "Guess I'm getting old—living too much in the past."

"It's all right, Frank," I said. "I understand. And I did, in a way of which I hadn't been capable a moment before."

Rowe walked to the north wall of his office, which was covered almost entirely with framed photographs. These were pictures of the *Spaceward* and her intrepid crew before and after those two memorable flights to the Moon and before the take-off to Mars. The south wall was covered with photographs of Lunar landscapes and others of Earth as seen from the Moon.

"Yes, that's the trouble with me," Rowe whispered. "Living too much in the past. . . . But who can blame me? Jimmy was all I had left after Helen died. And the *Spaceward*—well, you know yourself, Herb, that all the work I ever did with rockets was in the hope

that someday it would lead to a ship like the *Spaceward*. It did—but the price in the end. . . ."

I looked away, saddened by the dejection in his appearance and voice. There was silence for a long moment, and then Rowe whispered again.

"Seven years. . . . Jimmy, boy, what could have happened?"

My eyes were drawn to the photographs, and I wondered, too. I saw myself upon them, a Herb Farnam seven years younger, with much less gray in my hair. In a particularly large photograph which occupied a central position on the wall, I stood at Rowe's left—a younger Rowe, too—and at his right stood Jimmy, taller than his father, much slimmer, though possessing the same powerful build, and fully as handsome as my eldest daughter, Doris, had thought him to be. Around us were grouped the smiling heroes of the Moon flights—Paul Wheaton, Victor Sorelle, Art Kolh, Dave Sellers, and John Launder. And as background was the sleek, gleaming hulk of the *Spaceward*.

There was pioneers' courage, adventurer's daring, in the smiling faces of those men. There was strength in the metal hull of the *Spaceward*, tremendous power eloquent in the size of her jet tubes. But in the end? In the end had been seven years of silence, seven years of waiting, for men and a ship which had never returned. . . .

ROWE'S face was transfigured, almost younger, as he gazed at the photographs. It made me think how particularly true was his declamation to the effect that he lived in the past. Men do live in the past when it holds more pleasure than the present. For Rowe, everything of love and happiness was buried in the past.

And I wondered about all those others—the wives, sweethearts, relatives,

and friends—who had been linked to the men aboard the *Spaceward*. Did they, too, live in the past? It was a curiously poignant thought, for I had become pretty intimately acquainted with the men and the people in their lives.

I brought myself back to reality with a jerk. It was late, and Vera had made plans for the evening.

I touched Rowe's arm. "Frank, I'll have to be going. Wouldn't it be best if you—"

Rowe shook his head wearily and with something of doggedness. "No. I'd like to stay here a while, Herb. Don't worry about me; I'll be all right."

With many doubts about this latter, I left him. He was still gazing at the photographs, but his face was no longer transfigured. He, too, had been brought back to reality.

That was near the end of July. The days which followed were busy ones for me, and the dust of memories, stirred up by that interval in Rowe's office, settled rather soon. My duties at the plant kept me hopping, and my off hours were taken up with various social engagements. I had practically no home life to speak of; Vera, my wife, always had plans or invitations for something or other, and the house itself seemed nothing more or less than a temporary way station for a constant stream of Beth's and Andrea's young men. Not that I minded this latter; if anything at all, I was merely bothered by the contrast between Beth and Andrea on the one hand and Doris on the other.

While no less pretty or charming than her sisters, Doris, the eldest, was very quiet and serious. She had very little if any social life, and very seldom if ever went out. She was doing postgraduate work in literature, with an eye toward an eventual teaching position, and this seemed to absorb her to

the exclusion of all else—or so it seemed at the time. I'm one of those men who find women difficult to understand, and this was complicated further by the fact that in my family were four of them. I've often bewailed the lack of a son, though in latter years this has been compensated for by what happened to Jimmy—Jimmy, who had insisted on accompanying that ill-fated flight to Mars.

In the middle of October came the momentous news, brought to me by none other than Rowe himself. It was afternoon, and my nose was buried deep in a stack of reports, when he burst into my office more wildly excited than I've ever known him to be. For some seconds he had difficulty speaking; then words spilled out of him.

"Herb—the *Spaceward*! The *Spaceward*! She's back!"

I SAT there, staring at Rowe, too astonished to react at once. Then I leaped to my feet, every bit as wildly excited as he was.

When Rowe had calmed down sufficiently, he explained that he'd had the 'vision set in his office turned on, and an all-station newscast had announced the *Spaceward's* return. Site of the landing was Grant Field.

"Come on!" Rowe finished.

We gave no thought to the autumn chill then in the air; without pausing to don hats and coats, we ran madly to the landing platform on the building's roof, leaving a wake of shocked and startled employees behind us. Shouting incoherently at the garage attendants, I had my flitterjet run out, and then Rowe and I tumbled in. I jerked the little craft into the air with an abrupt burst of her jets.

We'd acted none too soon. A growing swarm of craft was on its way toward the Field. And when I landed the

flitterjet, it was only seconds ahead of a squadron of aerial police who had arrived to block further influx of the curious.

A man in the green uniform of a Field policeman ran up to us, shouting at us to leave. We identified ourselves quickly. Mention of Rowe's name and a glance at Rowe's face stilled further protests; without further hesitation, the Field policeman turned and led us to the administration building. It was here, according to him, that the men from the *Spaceward* had been taken after landing.

The Field policeman was a dignified young fellow, and he would, I'm sure, have preferred a decorously brisk walk, but Rowe and I hurried him first into a trot and then into a run. I was excited and impatient, of course, but Rowe was actually trembling. He was like a man on the verge of attaining a long-sought personal paradise. He stumbled as he ran, his eyes, wide and staring, fixed upon the administration building, and between laboring gasps of breath I could hear him murmur over and over again, "Jimmy. . . Jimmy, boy!"

This was undoubtedly the greatest moment of his life—a sort of climax point. The return of the two things that had always mattered most to him—Jimmy and the *Spaceward*. I hoped desperately that he wouldn't be disappointed. It didn't seem possible that all the men originally aboard the ship could have returned safe and unharmed after the dangers of seven years. Certainly, some of them would be lost. And if one of them were Jimmy . . . well, that would be just about the end of everything for Rowe. Seven years of waiting, rewarded finally with overwhelming grief. . . . Tension piled up within me as the administration building drew closer.

WITHIN me also was a feeling of awed anticipation. The explorers had returned from another world. What strange wonders had they seen? What bizarre adventures had they had? And how would they look after seven years?

These questions kaleidoscoped through my mind as I ran. And then we were elbowing our respective ways through a crowd before the doors of the administration building. The interior itself was quiet enough, though green-uniformed Field policemen seemed everywhere.

Finally we halted before a door guarded by a particularly large group of Field police. The officer accompanying us made panting explanations to what seemed to be a superior, and then Rowe and I were ushered into a room.

It was a bright and pleasant room, not very large, but it did seem spacious after the crowds I had seen. And it was quiet. I think I noticed the quietness first. A little later it struck me that the quiet was strange—strained and uncomfortable.

My senses sharpened suddenly; I looked about me, with a growing realization of something amiss. A group of men stood at one side of the room, near a line of broad windows. I recognized several as important personages and officials. It was from looking at them that awareness came to me that things were somehow wrong.

They were very quiet, those men. They were *huddled* together as though it were cold and they sought mutual warmth. They stood near those windows as though the sunlight which shone through were the most needed and necessary thing in the world. Their very attitudes were stiff and unnatural.

Directly across the room, before a table covered with dishes that seemed hardly to have been touched, sat four

men. I forgot everything else as I looked at them.

A shock went through me. It was a chilling sensation, compounded at once of utter surprise, dismay, and not a little of fear. I stared at them, mouth open, eyes bulging, for all the world as though the room were a zoo and those four men were weird beasts from some remote corner of the earth hitherto unexplored.

They rose as I stared. I smothered a gasp, caught myself in the act of stepping back. I believe I actually forgot in that moment that they were men—more, men whom I had once known intimately.

They were dressed in loose, severely-plain tunics which gleamed silkenly in changing tones of brown and gold. Over this they wore a sort of metal harness from which hung a number of objects or instruments that winked and glittered with their breathing. Hair as long as a woman's flowed down to their shoulders, and beards covered their jaws. The visible parts of their faces were burned almost black, and out of gaunt hollows their eyes burned luminously, strangely grave and somber.

I noticed these details first. Then I became aware of another, perhaps the strangest of all.

Fixed somehow in the center of the forehead of each was a large jewel—or at least what seemed to be a jewel. These glowed as though from some mysterious inner life of their own, and as they glowed, they *pulsed*. There would be a rainbow-hued darkening, followed by an interval of milky phosphorescence, repeated over and over in rhythmic beats. Even if it had not been for the alien quality which radiated from their faces and eyes, the bizarreness of their garments, the jewels alone would have made them disturbingly unearthly.

EXCEPT for having risen at the entrance of Rowe and myself, the four men made no other move. They merely gazed back at us with a grave, impersonal calm. A feeling of acute discomfort grew within me, something of that unease felt between new acquaintances, or old friends meeting again after long years, when conversation lags. But my sensations that that moment were greatly magnified by the strangeness of the four and the fact that nothing at all had been said. I felt an aching need for speech, for movement of some kind, but it seemed to me that anything I did now would be an anti-climax.

The situation was grotesque, unreal. There was nothing I wanted so much as to be able to crawl away and hide.

I glanced at Rowe, partly to note his reaction and partly to ease the strain. His face was stricken, hurt. He looked like a man who has been made the victim of a ghastly joke. He had expected, more or less consciously, to see men reasonably like the men, in manner and dress, of seven years before. But this change was one of such overwhelming proportions as almost to be an assault upon the mind.

As I watched him, Rowe's lips began to work. His eyes moved uncertainly over the four, standing with such solemn patience at the table. "Jimmy?" he whispered. "Jimmy?" His voice was hesitant, questioning.

I glanced back at the four explorers in sudden wonder. Up to now, I had not been aware of them as individuals, but merely as a single, fantastic group. Rowe's words threw the matter of identity sharply into my mind; I peered at the grave faces, searching for familiar details.

"Jimmy?" Rowe whispered again. His voice had grown pleading.

Out of the original six, four had re-

turned. Abruptly, I wondered if Jimmy Rowe were one of the two who had not returned.

Hardly had the thought passed through my mind when one of the four moved, bending at the waist in a slow and solemn bow. And then he spoke, his voice accented and strange.

"Greetings, father."

This, then, was Jimmy. I felt cold and almost a little sick.

Rowe was staring. The hurt in his face grew until I thought he would cry. But he gathered himself with what must have been a terrific effort. He spoke.

"Hello, son," he said. His voice was very low. Never have I seen him look so old as he did at that moment.

THERE was a touch on my arm; I turned, startled, to see that I had been approached by a man from the group across the room. I recognized him as Phillip Barringer, executive manager of the Field.

"What . . . what do you intend to do?" he queried, in a nervous whisper. "There'll be crowds . . . reporters—"

In spite of his fumbling attempt, I knew the idea Barringer was trying to get across. By their return, the explorers had created a tremendous sensation. People would want a look at these first men to make a successful space-flight to Mars. They'd want to make a fuss over the explorers, as people have made fusses over conquering heroes since time immemorial. And reporters—casters and scanner men—would want the epic story which lay behind that seven-year absence.

But by asking me what I intended to do, Barringer was hinting that to bring the explorers before the public was not the obvious thing to do in this case. He was right, if such actually was his purpose; from the consensus of reactions to the explorers so far,

the effect of their present appearances upon an unsuspecting world would be too much of a shock.

Time was needed—a little time during which preparations could be made for bringing the explorers before the public, and most particularly, their families and friends. In this way the impact of their change would be lessened greatly.

But how was it to be accomplished? I was not a little dismayed at the responsibility which had so unceremoniously been thrust upon me. I knew some of the obvious things that could be done, but I didn't know how to begin doing them. There would be mobs of curious people to turn away, hordes of sensation-hungry reporters to satisfy. How was I to deal with them? I was essentially a businessman, not a public relations expert like—

"Sam Pearce!" I burst out.

Barringer was startled. "Why . . . what—"

"Never mind," I said. "Take me to a visiphone."

"There's one in the next room," Barringer said. He eyed me uncertainly a moment, then turned and led the way.

Thought of Sam Pearce had come to me with an immense feeling of relief. Pearce would know just what to do about the situation; he was public relations expert at the plant, a shrewd, sharp young man, capable of anything from hushing up a scandal to creating one.

He was at his office when I dialed. Sight of his angular, thin face on the visiphone screen was additionally reassuring.

"Sam, I've got a job for you to do," I began abruptly. "This is the biggest thing you've ever handled."

"The explorers?" he asked, blue eyes brightening with interest. "I've heard

about the return of the *Spaceward*. I suppose you want me to handle the publicity on it."

"In a way, Sam. But get this—I don't want the thing played up. Instead, I want it quieted down as much as possible."

PEARCE looked at me as though he thought I'd gone crazy. He ran a hand through his shock of bristling, red hair and burst out, "Chief, I don't get it! This is the biggest thing that's happened in years. With the publicity from it, the firm could make millions. But you want me to hush it up. It doesn't make sense."

"It's the explorers, Sam. They aren't the same men who went away." I explained quickly.

Pearce's eyes were narrowed with a dawn of understanding. "I think I see, now," he said slowly. "What do you want me to do?"

"First, think of some way we can get the explorers away from Grant Field without a mob trailing after us. I need a little time to make them presentable, so that their appearances won't be so frightening. Once we're gone, your job will be to handle the crowds and reporters. Some way or another, you've got to satisfy them."

Pearce frowned thoughtfully, his hand running repeatedly through his red mane until it literally stood on end. I watched him with growing anxiety. Pearce had never failed me before. And if now, when I needed him most—

"Got it, Chief!" he exclaimed abruptly. "The explorers have made a long, hard trip, see? They're worn out, exhausted. They need a rest. I'll get the answers to some of the routine questions that will be asked, and this will temporarily satisfy the curious. As for getting the explorers away from Grant Field, I'll send the firm's am-

bulance to pick them up. An ambulance is the one thing most likely to be admitted to and from the Field without trouble. Hold everything until I get there."

I made arrangements for Sam Pearce's arrival, and while waiting for him, I had a short talk with Barringer and the others. I explained what I was trying to do, and asked them not to discuss the situation with reporters, as this would most likely result in conflictingly unpleasant publicity. They agreed readily enough. I don't know whether it was due to my success at persuasion or to the prestige of the firm I represented.

Most of them left. I suspected they'd been present mainly because of the publicity they'd hoped to obtain in connection with the explorers. Since nothing like that was to be forthcoming, there was little reason for them to remain. And it seemed to me they were glad to get out of the room.

Rowe and the explorers had been seated. There had obviously been no attempts at conversation. Rowe was staring dully at the floor. His grief couldn't have been any worse if Jimmy had not returned at all.

Noise from outside penetrated dimly. The crowds about the field were growing; there were shouts and the muted roar of many flitterjets. But here it was quiet—a quiet that grew with the weight of oppression. It was the strain of just sitting around with men you've known for years and not one word being said. Or at least I felt that way. Rowe seemed too far gone to feel anything. The four explorers were impassive. Their postures had a relaxed quality which seemed to indicate they did not consider the situation in the least embarrassing. They were as cold as fish asleep in a deep, icy pool, unresponsive to any bait.

THE growing murmur from outside added nothing to my peace of mind. When Sam Pearce finally arrived, I'd developed a serious case of nerves.

Pearce was halfway across the room toward me when he noticed the explorers. He stopped in his tracks, as though an invisible hand had reached out to halt him. His blue eyes widened, and he stared and stared. Then he turned to face me; he looked stunned.

"Lord!" he whispered. "Lord! I expected a surprise, but this. . ."

"You understand now?" I asked softly.

Pearce nodded dumbly. Then he stiffened with a return of purpose. "I've got the ambulance at a loading platform at the back where they can leave the building without being seen. But I've got to ask a few questions first. Can they. . .?"

"I think so," I said. I took Pearce over to the explorers and introduced him. They rose and bowed solemnly.

Pearce swallowed once, glanced at me uncertainly, and began, "We're going to take you away from here. It's going to disappoint a lot of people, and so I'd like answers to a few questions they'll want to know as a sort of substitute. First"—Pearce hesitated—"your names."

It was Jimmy who volunteered. "Paul Wheaton, Victor Sorelle, John Lauder, and myself, James Rowe."

"I see," Pearce acknowledged uncomfortably. He hesitated again. "There were six of you originally. What happened to the other two?"

"Kolb and Sellers? They stayed."

"Stayed?" Pearce stared. And so, for that matter, did I.

"Yes. They did not wish to return."

"Oh." Pearce glanced at me, a flabbergasted expression on his face. "Another thing, are there. . . well, are there men on Mars?"

"Yes."

The answer was made simply and very matter-of-factly, but I felt an eerie thrill. Here at last was a definite answer to one of the oldest questions men had always made regarding Mars. Yet, considering the change which had taken place in the explorers by contact with these other beings, I could only feel alarmed instead of excited.

Pearce went on. "The Martians. . . do they look like us?"

"In some ways," Jimmy replied non-committally.

"There are cities?"

"There are the ruins of cities. But at present there are none, in our conception of the word. The *Eanthii*—the Martians—have outgrown them."

PEARCE glanced at me again, and his blue eyes were dark. The *Eanthii*, who had outgrown cities. . . What, I wondered somberly, was it actually like on Mars? Jimmy was answering questions readily enough, but actually he was revealing very little. In what he did reveal lurked a suggestiveness that was—disturbing.

"One more thing," Pearce said. "Why were you gone for seven years?"

"The *Spaceward* was badly damaged in landing. Part of the time—except for that spent in travel—was spent in repairs. The other part. . . the *Eanthii* knew many things. We stayed to learn."

Pearce took a deep breath and straightened. There was a look on his face like that of a man who has been given a glimpse into the unknown and does not know whether to be awed or frightened at things he sees but does not understand. "I guess that's all. I'll add padding wherever necessary."

We were ready to leave. I paused only long enough to make provision for the *Spaceward* with Barringer. The ship

was to be moved to a hangar and kept under rigid quarantine for the time being. My own flitterjet, in which Rowe and I had arrived at the Field, was to be kept in storage until I had someone call for it.

I felt guilty at the thought of leaving Pearce to face things alone, but from the way I had to support Rowe as we walked to where the ambulance waited, I realized there was nothing else I could do. Rowe needed my help in what lay ahead, and I couldn't be in two places at once.

The ambulance craft was a combination of gyro and jet. The whirling vanes took us up gently, and the jet shot us toward Rowe's suburban home.

TWO days passed—days which I spent entirely at Rowe's home, going to bed so utterly exhausted that I hardly had strength to undress.

I'd had the explorers made presentable. They'd been dressed in civilized clothing, their hair cut and their beards trimmed. Shaving their beards off entirely, of course, would not only have been a painful process, but would have made the pallor of their cheeks and jaws stand out in sharp contrast to the dark portions of the exposed parts of their faces.

The finished job, while a great improvement over their former appearances, still wasn't as complete as I would have liked. There were two things about the explorers regarding which nothing could be done. The first was their air of utter detachment and disinterest, as though they lived and moved in worlds of their own. They answered readily enough when questioned or spoken to, but otherwise they would volunteer nothing. There was no animation about them, no real friendliness. They were polite and courteous, but other than that, they

might have been life-sized puppets moved by strings.

The second thing was the jewels—or whatever they were. These seemed to be permanent fixtures. Norris Trane, Rowe's physician and a close friend of us both, had had occasion to examine the jewels, and he'd reported they were set directly in the flesh and bone of the explorer's foreheads. It was a feat which could have been accomplished only by some miracle of surgery.

I'd contacted the families and friends of the explorers that first day, and had made arrangements for a meeting. I'd much rather have preferred to wait a few weeks in the hope that a return to earthly surroundings would bring the men back to normal, but knowing how impatient their families must be to see them again, I realized it would only lead to misunderstandings. Besides, there would have been too much pressure from other groups in the meantime. The only thing I could do was to have Pearce act as a sort of cushion between the explorers and all those with whom they came in contact.

I WAS depending rather heavily on Pearce. He'd accomplished a miracle at Grant Field, having turned away the crowds and the newsmen with no resulting unpleasantness. Newscasts on the same day of the landing had reported merely that the explorers had been very much weakened physically by the long trip back to Earth and would have to be held incommunicado until they had made a full recovery. Other than this, they contented themselves with the information Pearce had given them.

The respite was only a temporary one, however, for Pearce and I were aware the newsmen could not be held off long. But we had already made more or less definite plans for a press

interview.

The reunion between the explorers and their families and friends was to take place in the afternoon of the third day. Pearce had arranged everything with the care of a showman. The explorers had been dressed in bright, informal sport clothing, and the living room had been decorated with flowers. Pearce was especially pleased over the fact that it was a clear and sunny autumn day, for he claimed it would aid in the psychological effect he wished to produce to offset the weird effect the four returned spacemen made.

Pearce and I had tried to keep the group of visitors as small as possible, but it had been difficult. My own family had insisted on being present, for one thing—Doris, in particular. And for another, many of the people we had invited heedlessly brought along friends of their own.

I was tense and anxious when the people started arriving. More than anything else, I wanted things to go off well. Still too vivid in my mind was the picture of Rowe's disappointment. I hoped desperately that my efforts to spare these others the same would not have been in vain.

First to arrive were Sorelle's wife and daughter, his wife's parents, and his father, a white-haired, old man whose wrinkled features radiated a pathetic eagerness. Sorelle's daughter was about nine; she had been a mere baby when he left for Mars. We based a lot of our hopes on that child.

Rowe, Trane, and I were waiting with the four explorers in the living room. Pearce ushered in Sorelle's family with all the smiles and patter of a master of ceremonies. He had obviously given them a warning beforehand of what to expect, since it seemed to me that they looked the faintest bit apprehensive.

THE eyes of the group settled upon the explorers immediately upon entering the room. For a moment they stood hesitant, uncertain, their glances darting from face to face. Then Sorelle's wife uttered a cry: "Vic!" She ran toward him, her arms went around him, and she sobbed out her happiness against his chest.

Sorelle stood there, his arms at his sides. Upon his mask-like features, I thought I saw a slight frown.

The woman disengaged herself, and raised her tear-streaked eyes to his face. Slowly the happiness drained from it. Incredulity came, and a sudden welling of hurt.

"Vic . . . don't you remember me?"

"Yes. Greetings, Ada."

Pearce leaped into the breach. He rounded up the others, half pushed, half urged them forward. His smile was a bit strained, but his patter was coming fast.

" . . . been on Mars for a long time. Living on a strange world does things to you, of course . . ."

Pearce stooped beside Sorelle's little girl, and his voice was genial without being condescending. "Aren't you going to say hello to Daddy? You were just a baby when he went away, you know."

The child stared at Sorelle, disappointment showing naked in her eyes. Without a word, she turned and buried her face against her mother's coat.

The elder Sorelle seemed dazed by what he had witnessed. As though held back by a fear of his own reception, he stood motionless. His shoulders were bent a little more than when he had entered.

Then came a welcome diversion in the form of new arrivals. They were my own family. Vera was dressed as though for a presentation to royalty, and Beth and Andrea, as might have

been expected, had taken along their current beaux. And Doris— Her cheeks were flushed, and excitement shook her slender body like a wind.

Doris singled out Jimmy almost at once. She approached him slowly, whispering his name. I understood, then, why young men had held no interest for her, why she'd buried herself in books. My anxiety suddenly increased as I was hit by the knowledge that I was no longer an onlooker to this strange reunion; the coming of Doris had made the explorers' change a personal thing.

And abruptly, I was hoping—hoping desperately—that this time it would be different. The explorers couldn't all be the same in their reactions to the people they had once known and loved. Some of them ought to have a few human feelings left. If Jimmy would only smile, if he would only do something than gaze back aloofly at this girl who had waited seven years . . .

I'D ALWAYS been closer to Doris than to Beth and Andrea. In a way, Doris had taken the place of the son I'd never had. Her welfare had always particularly concerned me, and it had been with no little concern that I'd watched her devoting the best years of her life to studies which it had seemed strange should interest a pretty girl. And now, understanding, I prayed that she wouldn't be hurt, that those seven years wouldn't be wasted.

Doris had stopped. Her eyes were wide upon Jimmy. Bewilderment showed within them, a growing alarm.

He gazed back at her, his lips parted, and it seemed to me that an inner struggle of emotions showed dimly on his face as though he sought to remember things which he had forgotten, and remembering tried to find the old feelings that went with them—and failed. A

shadow slid over his features, a shadow out of an alien world.

Gravely, Jimmy bowed. "Greetings, Doris," he said.

Doris took her lip between her teeth, and her figure seemed to wilt. She seemed too stunned for tears. After a moment she straightened—and she smiled.

"Hello, Jimmy. It's nice to see you back." She came over to me, then, and I put my arm around her. And the pain she must have felt could have been no less than my own.

Then came Wheaton's wife and his two children, a boy and a girl in their late teens. It was the same. And it was the same with Lauder's mother, father, and brother when they arrived with several friends a short time later.

Pearce did his utmost to create distractions. He introduced one group to the other, had refreshments sent in, and he darted here and there, trying to get conversations started. Trane and I joined in, more out of sympathy for Pearce than any real desire to be sociable. Even Rowe seemed to understand the purpose that motivated us, for he roused from his brooding and began to help.

Pearce tried to draw the explorers into things, but with little success. They either missed or ignored his leads entirely, responding only to direct questions, and then with a grave bow and a few brief words.

ON THE whole, however, the affair didn't go off too badly. The people had been warned, and they had known more or less what to expect. And while disappointed, certainly, they didn't feel that the situation was entirely hopeless, for when time for departure came, the families of Sorelle, Wheaton, and Lauder approached me and asked when their respective men

could be taken home. They felt, obviously that, once home, the explorers would return to normal.

I couldn't make any definite promises, since I didn't wish to pass responsibility for the explorers into inexperienced hands until such time as the interest of the world had faded. I didn't know when that would be, though probably within a month at the least. And I hoped, during that time, that the explorers would be well started on the road back to recovery.

With such vague assurances as I was able to give, the people left. Rowe, Trane, and I drew our first real breaths of the entire day.

But that was only the beginning. In the weeks which followed, there were press interviews and 'vision interviews, these latter complete with 'casters and scanner men who spread their apparatus all over the house. There were scientists from points all over the globe, consumed with an avid eagerness for all data regarding Mars and its inhabitants. And Pearce and I turned down scores of invitations to banquets and requests for lectures.

It wasn't long before people finally became aware of the true state of affairs regarding the explorers and ceased in their efforts to be eulogizing. Pearce and I had nothing to do with this. Those who had come into contact with the explorers—newsmen, scientists, and various other groups—had carried away with them certain impressions which they had not hesitated to make public. The world now knew the explorers had been radically changed by their stay on Mars. And in fact, a few individuals harped on the explorers' queeriness in such a way as actually to make them seem dangerous.

Notable among these were Nick Griffin and Simon Hough, who seemed to vie with each other in their attempts

to cast the explorers in as suspicious and menacing a light as possible. Griffin was a newscaster who specialized in the sensation or expose type of reporting, and an indication of his abilities in this line is the fact that he had constantly to be accompanied by a bodyguard. He was probably the most unpleasant, unscrupulous, and yet the most successful man in his profession.

Hough wrote a daily popular psychology series for the papers, which at various times had been denounced by authorities of the subject as being erroneous, misleading, and filled with actual falsehoods. Yet the popularity of Hough's articles with the common man had never declined, and he continued with his entertaining distortions as blithely as ever.

IN THE explorers, Hough and Griffin had found a fertile field for the exercise of their particular talents, and their exploitation had reached a point where each tried to outdo the other in their efforts to be sensational. Griffin actually binted, in one of his newscasts, that the reason for the strangeness of the explorers was because their bodies had been taken over by Martian intelligences.

I didn't know whether to be amused or alarmed at flights of fancy such as this. Certainly, they could have had anything but an encouraging effect upon a public generally susceptible to hoaxes, scares, and rumors of all kinds.

I discussed the matter with Trane one evening. He seemed to regard it very seriously.

"I tell you, Farnam, I don't like this a single bit," he said earnestly. "Hough and Griffin are playing up the subject of the explorers merely for publicity. They're most probably not serious about even one-fourth of what they say. But the effect upon the public

is another story. There's always a great mass of people ready and willing to believe anything that comes over the 'vision set or is printed in papers. And it is just this kind of people who can unintentionally be incited to mob action."

I stared at Trane. "Isn't that a bit too strong? You surely couldn't expect anything like that to happen in the present case."

Trane shrugged. "Perhaps not. But with people you can never tell, Farnam. Man is gregarious only insofar as others like himself are involved. Those who do not conform to his standards of behavior or thinking are rigidly excluded or avoided. Fashions and fads are an expression of this instinct. You and I wear our present style of clothing because all other men do so. If we were to wear Roman togas or Medieval armor, we'd instantly be objects of the deepest suspicion.

"You must remember cases in which animals have been known to turn against one of their own kind because of some difference. A tame monkey released among its wild fellows is destroyed or driven away. A crow either accidentally or intentionally dusted with flour is pecked to death by others of its kind if it doesn't manage to escape first. And what is man beneath all his veneer of civilization but an animal? To be sure, man will tolerate a great many differences in his fellows—provided that he is able to understand them and rationalize about them on the basis of this understanding. But where these differences reach so far into the unknown as to verge upon the supernatural—

the witch-hunts and witch-burnings throughout all history.

"The explorers have been to Mars. They have returned greatly changed. Mars, now that it is known to be inhabited by beings like ourselves, is something to be regarded with deep distrust. Especially, Farnam, since its inhabitants apparently are possessed of mysterious powers capable of bringing about such a great change in the explorers.

"What, actually, do we know about the Martians? What does the common man know, fed as he is upon exaggerations and distortions by such men as Griffin and Hough? Mars is still very much an unknown quantity—and, Farnam, would it be too far from the truth to say that, to minds not adjusted to scientific methods of thinking, excess speculation upon this unknown quantity might push it so much further into the unknown that almost it begins to border upon the supernatural?"

I felt chilled. If Trane were right, Griffin and Hough were unknowingly stirring up forces which would have highly unpleasant results where the explorers were concerned.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about how the change in the explorers was most likely brought about," Trane said, after a long moment of silence. "From what I've learned from the explorers themselves, and from what I've been able to deduce, I think I have the answer.

"As you know, the *Spaceward* was rather badly damaged in the landing on Mars. Before a return journey to Earth could be contemplated, certain extensive repairs had to be made. The Martians, however, possessed neither the necessary metals nor the required technology which would have made quick repairs possible. It isn't that the Martians were a backward or degener-

"**A**BOVE all things, men fear the unknown, Farnam. They'll do the cruelest, most vicious things imaginable to protect themselves from it. Witness

ate race; it's just that their culture was not one which embraced the machine. Or you might say that their culture had become as far removed from the machine as ours at present is from that of the ancient Romans. In fact, I have good reason to believe that their culture was one of mind alone. I'm not certain of just in what ways, but you might say that power of mind accomplished for them what machines accomplish for us.

"THE Martians were willing to help, to the extent of learning things which they did not know or most likely had forgotten. But while there was willingness to co-operate—one side to teach, the other to learn—there was a complete lack of understanding. The difficulty was something like this: Suppose you had volunteered to aid a man of the Stone Age in the repair of certain tools or weapons. He has somehow wandered into your age, and before he can get back to his, these repairs must be made. He could not understand you, nor could you understand him. Yet the situation would not seem entirely hopeless; you could either obey instructions in sign language or simply emulate his actions.

"But would you know where flint heds were located, so that arrowheads and hatchet heads could be made? And would you know where to find the deer, to supply the thongs for hinding and the born for chipping? And would you know where to find the proper woods for haft and bow and arrow shaft?

"How much would sign language and emulation help you when it came to flaying the hide and shaping the bow? Even if you had watched very closely, would you know how to hold the piece of deer horn and exert the proper pressure in just the right places so as to chip the flint into the correct shape?

These things are not the result of mere emulation. They are skills—and can sign language make you understand all the little tricks and techniques that go into the mastering of any skill?

"Now apply these difficulties to a space ship. How could you explain to a Martian the various metals and their proportions which go into the making of a certain alloy? Would he understand, even if you did get your meaning across, having progressed as far beyond the use of metal as you have beyond that of flint and wood and hide? What about plastic, glass, and rubber? And what of temperatures that have to be exact to a degree, of measurements that have to be correct down to ten-thousandths of an inch?

"The difficulties of understanding would be practically unsurmountable. For you to teach the Martians your language would not be enough. There would still be technical terms, abstract ideas, precise shades of meaning which simply could not be gotten across. Before the Martians could aid the explorers with the repairs on the *Spaceward*, the difficulties of understanding had to be solved. Language was out, as were signs and diagrams. What, then, was left?"

IT WAS not a rhetorical question this time, for Trane paused as though expecting me to answer. But I could think of nothing at once, and he went on:

"Telepathy, of course. But first some means of reception and transmission, and perhaps even translation, of thought had to be devised. And the Martians accomplished this with exquisite cleverness."

"The jewels in the foreheads of the explorers!" I burst out, in sudden realization.

Trane nodded. "Exactly, Farnam.

It is for this reason that I believe Martian culture to be one of mind. Only a people with an immense knowledge of the mind and its workings could have accomplished what was done. Just what the jewels are, I don't know. They may be pseudo-living crystalline entities, or just enormously compact devices on the order of a radio set. But whatever they are, the jewels made possible complete understanding between the Martians and the explorers. The Martians learned things from the explorers, and the explorers learned things from the Martians."

Trane leaned toward me. His eyes narrowed upon mine, and he spoke very softly. "Farnam, let's suppose you and I had direct contact of mind to mind. Isn't it likely that we would become very similar in our patterns of thinking, assuming that the period of contact extended over something like five years? Remember, Farnam, this relationship would be even more intimate than that between husband and wife, both of whom, in many cases, tend to become very similar in speech and mannerisms after many years of married life.

"Since you and I are of the same race and almost at the same level of mental development, there would be little or no difference in the amount to which the one of us would affect the other. But suppose I were a Martian, one of a different race, one whom because of my mental culture, was possessed of an infinitely higher level of mind. Wouldn't that mental relationship change you more than it would myself? To the extent where you formed entirely new patterns of thinking, new values, new viewpoints? To the extent where almost you became a Martian mentally yourself?"

"Yes," I whispered. "My Lord, yes!"

"That's what happened to the explor-

ers," Trane said. "They remained on Mars for five years simply because they had become so engrossed in learning that, even with the *Spaceward* completely repaired, returning to Earth no longer mattered. You might almost say they went away to school. Now, having graduated, they're back—and, Farnam, I'm afraid to guess why. . . ."

"Why, what do you mean?" I demanded. There seemed to be something more than slightly ominous about Trane's last words.

TRANE spread his hands wide in a sudden gesture. "I wish I knew, Farnam. I'm only certain that their reasons for returning have nothing to do with us. You've seen their reactions to meeting their parents, wives, friends, children. They clearly have no human feelings of love or friendship left. No—it was something else that finally drew them back to Earth."

How true this was, I found out within a short time. The wives of Wheaton and Sorelle, and Lauder's parents, had constantly requested to know when their respective men could be taken home. Direct interest in the explorers, except for that kept alive by the sensation-mongering of Griffin and Hough, had faded. I felt that the time had more or less arrived. But when I broached the subject of returning home to the explorers, they refused.

"To return to our homes would not be wise," Sorelle stated gravely. "We could not resume our former lives. We have caused sufficient pain and trouble. Returning to our homes would only cause more."

And he was right. But that raised another problem. I'd been counting on having the explorers taken off my hands by their families, but since they did not wish to return to their homes, they were as much a white elephant in total as

before.

"What on earth are we going to do?" I asked Rowe, the same day. "We can't take care of the explorers forever, as though they were hopeless invalids."

"I'll take care of it, Herb," Rowe told me. "I'd been intending to take Jimmy up to the Wisconsin place. Since the others are not going to return to their homes, I'll just take them along."

It was hardly the time of year—what with winter approaching—for such a location as Rowe's Wisconsin estate, but as far as privacy and quiet were concerned, the place was ideal. The house itself was situated in a forest-like stretch of country, and neighbors were few and far between. There was a town some distance away from which supplies could be brought in.

ROWE laid his plans quickly. He had a caretaker and his wife living at the Wisconsin house. These he intended to augment with hired help from the nearby town. Harris, Rowe's pilot, was to assist temporarily by ferrying in such supplies as could not be obtained from the town.

Trane volunteered to go along. He claimed to need a rest in a location such as Rowe's Wisconsin estate, but I knew he was concerned with Rowe's well-being. Rowe had declined steadily during the last seven years, and the past few months had left him only a shadow of his former self. Trane could manage it, I supposed; he had turned the greater part of his practice over to a younger man, and had been on the verge of retiring ever since.

I saw them off one morning, when the first snow of the season had started to fall. As the ship dwindled in the sky, I had the curious feeling that it was taking them into a sort of voluntary exile.

Upon me now was left the unpleasant

task of informing the families of Sorrelle, Wheaton, and Lauder that their respective men would not be coming home. I could not bear the thought of facing them with what I had to say, and instead wrote a series of letters in which I explained the situation fully and frankly.

That left only Doris. Like the others, no doubt, she had been entertaining hopes that Jimmy would come around in time, and with her to act as constant companion and nurse, the old state of relations would return. Consequently, it was a shock to her to learn of the move that had been made. In an effort to soften the blow, I made arrangements with Vera to have Doris taken to a winter resort in the South, and I left special instructions with Beth and Andrea to make sure Doris met plenty of young men.

Then I settled down to my work at the plant. Matters demanding my personal attention had piled up overwhelmingly during my frequent absences, and for the next four weeks I was busy to the exclusion of all else.

Finally I had things under control again. A restlessness took hold of me. I was curious to know how affairs were going at the Wisconsin place, and in addition I had a desire to see Rowe and Trane. Deciding I needed a short vacation myself, I packed a few things, and pointed the nose of my flitterjet toward Wisconsin.

Trane met me at the door when I arrived. The profuseness of his greetings seemed strange.

"Farnam! Say, this is great. Glad to see you again. Come right in. Sure is good to see you. Here—let me help you with your bag. Heard your ship landing at the field, but thought it was Harris returning from an errand."

"How's Rowe?" I asked, as we finished shaking hands.

Trane sobered. "He's in a bad way, Farnam—a mighty bad way. Acute melancholia and depression."

"As bad as that?"

"Worse. Farnam, if we could only do something—Rowe won't live another six months if things continue the way they are now."

"My Lord!" I whispered. It was some seconds before I could get around to my second question. "And how are they . . . the explorers?"

A CLOUD seemed to slide over Trane's face. "Oh, they're well enough, I guess." And then, abruptly, "I suppose you'll want to see Rowe. He's up in his room. I'll take you there."

The house seemed unnaturally silent and deserted to me as we walked across the hall. "I thought Rowe was going to obtain hired help from the town," I remarked to Trane. "Where are they? Day off?"

Trane shrugged, looking uncomfortable. "He did get a couple of women to help with the cooking and housework. They quit after a week. We couldn't get any one else. The caretaker, Johnson, and his wife, Nora, have been doing practically everything around here."

I stopped. "But what on earth is wrong?"

"The explorers. The townspeople are afraid of them. They seem to have taken Griffin and Hough a bit too seriously."

"Damn Griffin and Hough!" I breathed.

"Farnam, a few days after the women quit, a delegation from town called here at the house. They asked, quite politely, if we wouldn't leave the vicinity."

"Well, if that doesn't beat—" A sudden surge of anger choked off the rest.

I watched Trane bleakly.

"I told them," he went on, "that we hadn't broken any of their laws, and until we did so, they had no right to ask us to leave." Trane sighed. "We had to keep Harris, since he has to run to the city now for supplies. Tradespeople in the town won't sell him anything."

There seemed nothing I could say which would express my utter amazement and disgust. Trane and I continued on in silence. As we strode up the stairs, a thin, whining sound became suddenly audible.

I stopped, gripping the banister. "What's that?"

THE cloud was back over Trane's face. "One of their machines, I guess. You see, the explorers have made a workshop out of the basement playground."

"A workshop?"

"You might call it that. Laboratory would be a more accurate description. They've got it filled with machines and chemicals and things. About all Harris has been doing lately is to ferry in stuff for them."

I watched Trane silently. He was worrying at his lower lip, and it seemed to me that something more quivered on the verge of utterance. But nothing came.

Rowe was in his room, seated in an armchair near the windows, an opened book lying in his lap. He wasn't reading, however, just staring moodily into space. He looked around slowly and wanly as we entered.

"Why, Herb! This is a nice surprise." Rowe rose from the chair and pumped my hand. "Staying?"

"Maybe for a week or so." I could think of nothing else to say. Sight of Rowe had come to me with a distinct shock. He was gaunt and unkempt,

and there was a haunted look about his eyes which not even his joy at seeing me could remove.

"How's everything at the plant?" Rowe asked, and this, I realized, more to set me at ease than anything else.

We spoke of business matters for a while. Then talk turned from political events to the weather, and finally there seemed nothing more left to say. After a rather unnerving silence, Trane and I left.

Dinner that evening was a strange and silent affair. The mood of uneasy tension which permeated the house had by then communicated itself to me quite strongly. Nobody seemed immune to it; I'd been greeted by Johnson and Harris, and later by Johnson's wife, Nora, and I'd felt it in each of them as tangibly as I'd felt it in Trane at the very first moment of my arrival.

The only persons present at the table were Rowe, Trane, and myself. I wondered over this for a time; then finally I voiced my thoughts to Trane.

"Where are the explorers? Aren't they going to eat with us?"

Rowe and Trane glanced at each other. Rowe avoided my eyes, and sunk deeper into that apathy which seemed to have become characteristic of him. Trane shrugged.

"The explorers don't take meals with us, Farnam. Johnson leaves their food by the workshop door. Maybe they prefer to eat alone, or maybe they're too busy to join us."

"That workshop . . ." I muttered. "Trane, have you any idea of what they're doing?"

"I've wondered about it. But as long as the explorers are keeping themselves amused, it might be best to leave well enough alone."

AFTER dinner, we retired to the living room, where we talked for a

while over drinks and cigars. Rowe did not stay long; after lapsing into one of his all-too-frequent spells of moodiness, he excused himself and left.

"Something's got to be done about Rowe," I told Trane. "He ought to be gotten out of this atmosphere."

"I've suggested a trip," Trane said. "But Rowe won't consider leaving the house. He seems to feel a strong responsibility where the explorers are concerned."

I had an overwhelming sense of futility; it was such an impossible situation from every angle. "My Lord, Trane, how's all this going to end? Things can't continue like this forever. Playing nursemaid to the explorers, who don't seem to give a damn about anything; Rowe, moping himself into his grave—"

Trane spread his hands wearily. "What can we do that we haven't done already?"

I could find no immediate answer to the problem. Fate itself was to decide that for us. And it came in a way and with a suddenness which Trane and I could never have foreseen.

In the middle of the afternoon of the next day, Trane and I were interrupted at a game of cards by the sound of approaching automobiles. We reached the windows in time to see two cars pull up in front of the house. Men emerged from each; I counted eight all together. They stood in a hesitant group for a moment, glancing uneasily about them. Then they started slowly toward the door.

I opened the door just as the first knocks sounded. The group drew back, as though they had not known just what to expect.

"Well," I said. "What do you want?"

A tall, gaunt man with a sharp, predatory face stepped forward. He drew back the lapel of his overcoat to allow

me sight of a glistening badge. "Sheriff Overton," he announced. "From town." He produced a folded oblong of paper from one of his pockets, extended it to me. "Search warrant. We want a look at the bouse."

I MADE no move to take the paper. The fact that people would go to such lengths to satisfy a mean, narrow-minded curiosity left me stunned.

"But we've done nothing wrong!" I got out at last. "We haven't broken any laws!"

"It's not what you've done," Overton said. "It's what you might do. It's those four explorers. They're dangerous. You're harboring undesirable characters. I got a community to protect, and I'm playing safe."

Overton's last words hardly registered upon me. Among the men behind him, I had caught sight of two whose very presence seemed to explain everything. They were Nick Griffin and his bodyguard, Matt Yeager.

"You!" I snapped at Griffin. "So you're the one behind this."

"You got me wrong," Griffin protested quickly, though his eyes were furtive. "I found out you were keeping the explorers here, and just wandered into town to see if I could pick up some news. I happened in on this search party."

"He said we ought to take a look inside the house," one of the men behind Griffin muttered.

"Yeah," another chimed in. "Said we might all get killed some day if we didn't."

Griffin seemed to contract within his expensive overcoat. "Well, maybe I did make a few suggestions," he said lamely.

I don't know where I got the cold rage that I put into my next words. "Griffin, I'm not going to forget this.

You've caused a lot of trouble with your rotten, lying newscasts, and this just about tops everything. You put these men up to this merely to gather more material for your vicious lies. Well, let me warn you that this is the last trick you'll ever pull. Starting here and now, I'm going to use every bit of influence I have to see that you get kicked off the 'vision set. There's a lot of people whose lives you've ruined with your slander. They won't hesitate to help me."

Griffin licked his lips. Yeager looked about him with a faintly bewildered air, as though he did not quite understand what was going on. The men around them moved away, shifted awkwardly.

"Could be just a lot of lies, like he says," someone whispered audibly.

Overton frowned at Griffin. "Well, still want to go through with this?"

Griffin's lips worked, but words did not come at once. "Since you got that search warrant—"

"All right, then," Overton nodded in sudden decision and turned back to me. "We'll take a little look around. Just for appearance."

"We have nothing to hide, as far as I know," I said. "Come in."

THEY trooped through the house, like boys passing a graveyard at midnight.

"Where do the four explorers keep themselves?" Overton asked at last.

"They have a workshop in the basement," Trane supplied. "I'll take you there."

Jimmy, Wheaton, Lauder, and Sorrelle were standing together in a little group when we entered. It was my first sight of them since they had been moved here. Their beards had grown long, and they seemed much thinner. Their hair was unkept, their clothing soiled and disheveled. They looked at

us expressively, but the jewels in their foreheads pulsed with a rapid play of color, and I had the curious conviction that complete awareness of the situation glowed in their strange, luminous eyes.

There were gasps and indrawn breaths as the men crowding behind me got the full picture the explorers made. I was not a little surprised myself, for it looked as though the past four weeks had been anything but easy ones for them.

Trane began to explain the presence of the men from town. I paid no attention. My eyes were darting anxiously about the workshop. If only there were nothing which might be interpreted as dangerous. . . .

The recreational equipment had been piled at one end of the room. The workshop proper was situated at the other end. It was at this end that we stood. Looking about, I saw that the work of the explorers had been concentrated about a single object—a great cube of wire lattice-work, over which streamers and tongues of golden fire writhed and twisted. The cube seemed strangely unsubstantial, shimmering with the illusion of unreality.

The machinery, the tools, the apparatus, grouped about the cube, all were familiar to me. The explorers had taken Earthly things and with them created something fantastic and alien.

There was a sidling movement beside me. I noticed it only dimly. My gaze was fixed upon the shimmering cube with a kind of hypnotic fascination. I had the overpowering sensation of gazing into vast distances.

AN ABRUPT push jerked me back to awareness. I saw the retreating back of Matt Yeager, who was following another figure across the workshop. Griffin.

Griffin had eased himself from among the others, and was moving slyly toward the giant cube. Yeager, true to his trust, was following him.

Trane was talking, talking desperately, trying to convince the men from town that the explorers had made a workshop out of the playroom merely to keep themselves occupied. The others were listening. They weren't aware of what Griffin was doing.

Before I could act, there was a low-voiced exclamation. Jimmy darted past me, his face alive with sudden expression.

Griffin had reached the cube, and his hand was extended as though to touch it. Jimmy reached him, caught his hand, jerked him away.

"You must not touch that!" Jimmy admonished fiercely. "It is death—"

Then Yeager reached Jimmy. Disaster struck all at once.

Yeager's heavy, scarred features had been twisted with puzzlement throughout everything. Nature had seemingly packed his body so completely with muscle that there had been little if any room left for brain. He had seen Jimmy leap forward and snatch at Griffin's arm. Griffin, most likely, hadn't really understood why. But to all intents and purposes, Griffin had been threatened. It was his duty to protect Griffin. This Yeager understood.

Yeager caught Jimmy by the shoulder, swung him around. A ham-sized fist smashed into Jimmy's mouth, sent him reeling backward. Then Yeager followed up to finish what he had started, like a dog that will not cease worrying a rat until all movement has ceased.

But Yeager never reached Jimmy again. Wheaton, Lauder, and Sorelle, had stepped forward, their eyes blazing with a cold fury. Like a battery of searchlights, the jewels in their fore-

heads focused upon Yeager. Yeager crumpled to the floor as though abruptly pole-axed.

Griffin released a scream of pure terror, scurried madly toward the door. Abruptly, he clutched at his chest, collapsed like a limp bundle of expensive rags.

There were yells and shouts as the men from town awoke into action. They whirled as one for the door, where they stuck, gibbering and clawing, in frenzied efforts to be first to get through it. Then they were through it. The pound of their retreating footsteps echoed throughout the house. Car motors roared into life outside. There was the clash of gears. The sound of the motors faded with distance. Then there was silence.

TRANE roused into motion, went quickly from the prone form of Griffin to that of Yeager. He made a brief examination of each. Finally he straightened up, his face pale and incredulous.

"They're both dead. Griffin died of a heart attack. But Yeager—" Trane swung around to the explorers. "What . . . what did you do to Yeager?"

"We blasted him with a *vorgan* field of the third order," Wheaton said quietly. "In other words a lethal beam of mental force."

"But that's murder!" Trane exclaimed.

"It is justice," Sorelle said.

Trane nodded slowly. "In a way it is. But according to Earthly laws—"

"Earthly laws no longer concern us," Wheaton said.

"But Earthly retribution is still something to reckon with," I put in. "You've got to get away from here. There's no telling what those townspeople will do now. They couldn't possibly have seen all that happened, and probably think

both Griffin and Yeager were just suddenly attacked and murdered."

"There is no need to leave." It was Jimmy, who had apparently recovered from Yeager's blow. "We have already made certain preparations."

I went cold with sudden fear. "My Lord!" I whispered. "You don't intend to cause further harm?"

Jimmy shook his head slowly and gravely. "No further harm. Concern yourselves with this no longer." He pointed at the door. "I must ask you to go. There are certain things that we have yet to do."

And somehow, without any further protest, Trane and I were walking toward the door. The next thing I knew, we were in the hall leading to the living room, and Rowe, Johnson, and Harris were crowding about us with anxious questions.

Trane explained what had happened, trying to make it as easy on Rowe as possible. But when he had finished, Rowe collapsed into a chair, burying his face in his hands.

I turned quietly to Harris. "Better give the ships a check-over. We may have to leave here unexpectedly."

WITH the approach of evening, a thin, fine snow started to fall, and a cold wind howled about the house. Queer whining and humming sounds came from the workshop below. Trane and I glanced at each other, wondering desperately what the explorers could be doing. Rowe had been given a sedative by Trane and sent to bed. He had been in no condition to bear the tension of waiting for what was to happen next.

Night fell, and the howl of the wind grew stronger. I paced the living room, while Trane stood at the windows, gazing out into the darkness.

"Seems to be snowing harder," Trane commented after a time.

"The weather may be delaying them," I said.

"They'll come," Trane assured grimly. "Sooner or later. There are witches to hunt—"

"Can't we do something?" I burst out. "Anything but sit around and wait like this?"

"That's all we can do, I guess—until they get here. Leaving would only make matters look worse."

"But the explorers—" I broke off abruptly. A deep, deep sound vibrated suddenly throughout the house, like the plucking of a giant harp-string. It came again—and again. Within ensuing seconds it was repeated many times. Then the howl of the wind once more became the only sound. *

There was a sudden clatter of footsteps, and Harris burst into the room. "They're coming!" he announced breathlessly. "I saw the lights of their cars down the road. They're coming fast—and there's a lot of them."

I jerked into motion. The explorers had to be warned.

I pounded through the hall and down the stairs. Words leaping to my lips, I pushed open the door of the work-

shop. Then I halted, frozen with utter stupefaction.

It was a workshop no longer. It was just a playroom again. My amazed eyes passed over ping-pong and billiard tables, dart boards, archery sets. The machinery, the tools, the weirdly shimmering cube—all were gone.

Of the four explorers, of the bodies of Griffin and Yeager, there was no slightest sign. They had gone with all the rest.

When I turned dazedly toward the door again, I saw Trane standing there. We stared at each other.

"Gone," I whispered. "Gone!"

Trane nodded slowly. "They went back to the only place where they were understood. They did not need the *Spaceward*. Their knowledge, given expression by Earthly tools and materials, provided them with something better."

And then realization came to me, too. "They returned to Earth because here were tools, materials, countless other things, which could not be obtained on Mars. And now—"

Trane took a deep breath. "And now they've gone—home."

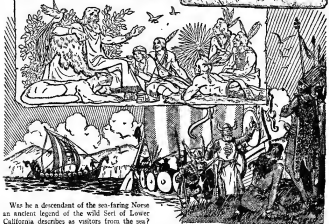
Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of *Amazing Stories*, published quarterly at Chicago, Illinois, for Oct. 1, 1945. Name of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared A. C. Appel, who having been duly sworn according to law, depose and say that he is the business manager of *Amazing Stories* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation, etc.) of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the office caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, submitted in compliance with the Federal Income and Registration, printed on the reverse of this form, to-wit: 1. That the name and address of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, W. H. Holt, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, R. G. Dime, 135 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, Raymond Palmer, 145 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, A. C. Appel, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (a) owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereafter the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent. or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given. (b) *Amazing Stories*, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; A. C. Appel, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; W. H. Holt, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; R. G. Dime, 135 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; W. H. Holt, 335 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; R. G. Dime, 135 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (a) there are none, so state; (b) none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company (not alone, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee, or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given, also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing all such knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated to him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is: (This information is required from daily publications only.) Arthur E. Puller, Business Manager. (Signature of business manager.) Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1945. (Not.) A. C. Appel, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1948.)

SCIENTIFIC

Quetzalcoatl, or Kul-kulkan, the great white reformer, so he is known, went from tribe to tribe preaching against war and sacrifice. He was identified by a feathered serpent, was said to be god.



The great white reformer lived in a garden in the north. Was this the Mississippi valley? Was he, perhaps, one of the mound builders?



Was he a descendant of the sea-faring Norse an ancient legend of the wild Seri of Lower California describes as visitors from the sea?

MYSTERIES

THE BEARDED WHITE PROPHET

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

The amazing story of a great good man who taught the Aztecs the horror of blood sacrifices and ended them

ALTHOUGH Bancroft mentions Pidgeon's "Traditions of Decoodah" as one of the foremost authorities upon the Mound-Builders, one wonders if he ever read the book, as he seems to have missed its entire import. And this is strange for a man who devotes so much time and space to the minute descriptions of Sahagun on the historically less important horrors of Aztec ritual.

In the light of Decoodah's traditions, many bits of otherwise obscure legendary fragments, or stories gathered by the early travellers take on an entirely different color. In the lore handed down among the Chippewas, the description of the beautiful city which they stormed and destroyed, upon the site of their present reservation on Lake Superior, and their subsequent intermarriage with the conquered women, gives one the needed sequel to Decoodah, as does the Legend of the Natchez. Both fill in parts of the structure whose outlines Decoodah has sketched.

Through Chippewa eyes, looking back down the vistas of their tribal memories, one sees a land of widely cultivated fields, of large decorated wooden pyramids with temple superstructures, and of rivers which served for highways of traffic. They are Mayan-like cities of wood instead of stone, and they become links between the great wooden communal house of the Northwest and the Grecian beauty of the sculptured stonework of Mithra, Mexico.

Trying to fit this civilization of the Mississippi Valley into the composite picture of the Americas, is not altogether impossible of fulfillment. When, in the time of King Quinalpopoca, in Tenochtitlan, "The City of the Lagoons," (Mexico City), a young noble by the name of Papaxtla inquired the direction of the silver and mother-of-pearl city of Ancient Tula, the priest of the Quetzal-god told him that there were four. One, said the priest, lay to the south in the Land-of-Thorns. One lay over the snow-capped mountains of the west in the Land-of-Flowers. One lay to the north in the Land-of-Cloud-Serpents, and one to the east over the Sunrise-Sea.

Such an answer may have only been to put off the youth's desire to see the city of story and song for himself. Could the people of Votan who were the ones reported to have come from over the Sunrise-Sea, have established so many other

"Tulaha" after that dearly-remembered capital which they left behind? People from time immemorial have done just this. The world map is filled with "New England," "New Wales," "New York," "New Holland" and the like. Yet, of course, the answer may have been a lie.

Nevertheless, if it had been a lie, why would it have survived down to the present day? Why would the name of Land-of-Thorns be given to what was undoubtedly the Mayan country where self-torture by thorns was widely practiced according to their temple-paintings? And if it was not a lie, then the name of Cloud-Serpents for the Mississippi is most significant, for Quetzalcoatl and Kul-kul-kan are the names* for the white bearded prophet—The Great Reformer, who roamed from tribe to tribe, apparently from one end of the Americas to the other, preaching to each people in their native tongue and always decrying the twin evils of Amerind culture—war and human sacrifice.

So strong is the impression of this figure that we can almost date the location of a tribe by their legends of The Great White Reformer. For example, the Papagoes have been at their present location for two milleniums because he is connected with their desert surroundings, although they have him confused with their earlier wind-god, while the Hopis are later migrants, and do not connect the name of the White Reformer with their present surroundings. According to Mexican records, he left Mexico to go south in the year 64 A.D.

After the passing of The Great Reformer, the nations began to follow his religion. The new spiritual rebirth, and the worship of a supreme god swept the old sacrificing priesthood into banishment. A period of great prosperity followed, in which, apparently, the main high priest took the name of the Great Reformer and was often confused in later records with the original prophet. In South America this may have been the region of Viru-Cocha before the return of the Incas and their sun-worship; in Yucatan, it was during the reign of the Itz'es who confused him with their own earlier deity; and in Mexico, it was during the reign of the Toltecs and the rise of Tula, The

* Both mean "feathered serpent," 1st in Aztec, 2nd in Mayan.

Magnificent, before the return of the Aztec ritual which was sacrifice run amuck.

Strangely enough, into this continent-wide picture, the Mounds offer evidence of the same Great Reformer. The open hand, the T-symbol and the cross which Quetzal-coatl took for his personal emblems are to be liberally found in the Mounds. Fragmentary legends of the Mississippi mention him though he is often confused with the moon (because of his white color evidently) even as farther west, the Algonkies confuse him with the elder Twin, the Zunis with a long-forgotten emperor, and the Havasupai and neighboring tribes of the Mohave with a creator-deity who survived the flood.

After years of great prosperity, the sacrificing priesthood came back into power. With the Itzas, it may have been the Quiche invasion, or a new wave from the sacrificing Caribbeans. With the Toltecs, the end of the capital city of Tula and its golden age came probably with the invasion of the Chichimecs, while in the Mississippi the counter-revolution in religion came with the invasion of the sacrificing Turtle and The Snake.

According to Decodah, not all of the religious temples were places of sacrifice. In describing the mound which had always been the holy-of-holies of the Ancient Elks, Decodah says that none but the sanctified foot of a high-priest had ever trod upon that sacred spot, nor had it ever known death, violence, or even the shedding of blood until the coming of the white man. This is certain evidence of a religion other than that of the "Southerners" who hurled the hearts of their enemies in their "Eternal-fire," or even the later religion of the Elks themselves, who sacrificed to both the sun and the moon.

We know from Mexican records that the Great White Reformer lived in a quiet garden in the north where he had taught many disciples to spread his doctrines, before crossing the tall snow-capped mountains on his way to Cholula. Is it possible that this garden might have been in the Mississippi Valley?

Not only do we have much evidence in the Mounds of the presence of the White Reformer, but the symbol of the Plumed-Serpent, which was his symbol, runs from the Puelhos to the Sioux. Many young Indians have come to the present writer, puzzled by the evidence of what they have been taught to believe an exclusively Mexican religion, in the lore of their own tribes.

Little work has been done to co-relate the civilizations of the Americas, but when it is finally done, this rather striking figure of The Great White Prophet, a little too romantic and imagination-seizing for science to regard as proper material for study, will be found to be a splendid date-stone.

The late inventor of good storage batteries, Mr. Willard,* used the wealth gained by his inventive genius to follow up his avocation—the study of The Mayans. In his book, "The Bearded Conqueror," he has confused two great Amerind fig-

ures—both white men. One was the earlier and much holier Prophet who always preached against sacrifice. The later one—The Bearded Conqueror, came into the Mayan Country at the head of an army, and forced the custom of sacrifice back upon an unwilling populace. This latter figure, probably a thousand years later than the first in time, had, it is interesting to note, a black stick which hurled fire and killed at a distance. What white adventurer, probably wrecked or stranded, kept his musket and ammunition for such propitious moments that it would give him the command of an army, and finally bring him the throne of the Mayans?

These two white men, preserved by the history and legends of a red man's world, could not have been more opposite, evidently, in temperament and ideals. And this is lucky for solving the historical sequence, for otherwise they would be bound to be confused by future students following in the footsteps of Mr. Willard†. However, in spite of this confusion, the contribution of the inventor of our automobile battery to the better understanding of the "Bearded Conqueror" is most welcome.

One must add that there are other white men recorded by Amerind legend and history beside these two, and the founders of Ancient Chan-Chan who may have been early white men of the Spider Totem. There is Wako the Prophet of the South Seas, who may have been The Great White Prophet of North America. Also there are the Lambayakas who landed with their court just north of Chan-Chan, upon the Pacific Coast of South America; and there is the story preserved among the wild Seri of Lower California, of the ship of sea-faring Norsemen who carried powerful bows and arrows, who burned whale oil and whose most outstanding woman character on board, probably the wife of the ship's master, was a flaming red-head. These Norse, described the homes they left behind in their own land, stayed an entire season, intermarried with some of the natives, and finally left, taking some natives with them and leaving some of their own members behind. The Seri will tell you that Norse blood is the reason that the Mayos have pale skin, blue eyes, and grow a beard, although they are apparently full-blooded Indians.*

Yet of all these occasional travellers, none are so universally-beloved and honored by all tribes, even though those tribes have long since returned to sacrifice, as the figure of the Great Reformer, or the White Prophet, as he is often called, who predicted the coming of the white man, and who is still secretly worshipped by many American Indians who are nominally Christians.

†T. A. Willard of Willard Batteries. The great inventor died this year, and in his death, Mayan archeology loses one of its most popular writers.

*The Mayo tribe is located upon the Mayo River near Yagui and Seri territory. Cajeme was one of the white-skinned, blue-eyed, full-

blooded Mayos. He became a great Yaqui chief, as politically the Mayo are a sub-tribe of the Yaqui. The author was acquainted with a full-blooded Mayo (at least as far as was known) who was red-haired and so fair that everyone guessed him to be either a Swede or an Irishman. People simply refused to believe that he was a Mexican Indian.

* Also confused by certain Mayan records, or traditions.

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Personal research by author for historical legend of the Chippewas.

BLOOD THE LIFE-GIVER

By ROBERT LAWRENCE

WHEN the blood is heated, you rave. When the blood is chilled stranger things happen. Sir Joseph Bancroft conducted a famous experiment on the chilling of blood. He, himself, was the victim. He lay naked in an icy room while an assistant watched. For a time his body tried to combat the cold. Bancroft's mind told him to get up, walk, keep his blood in circulation. But he refused for the sake of science. Then his mind gave up the battle. He stretched out his legs. He felt warm. He seemed to enjoy basking in the cold and was content to lie still, blissfully indifferent to a death from which his vigilant assistant saved him with only instants to spare.

Scientists on a mountain-climbing venture tested the oxygen content of the air at higher levels. When they reached the 18,000 foot level in the Andes Mountains in South America, they all suffered from "mountain sickness"—a sign of oxygen deficiency. Before they had set out on their journey special precautions had been taken so that they could have easily avoided such a condition. Cylinders filled with extra supplies of oxygen had been brought along for that purpose and yet not one man of the group thought of using the equipment.

Sir Bancroft pedaled a stationary bicycle in a room while slowly and carefully the oxygen was being withdrawn. Bancroft planned the experiment. At a certain time in the proceedings he intended to manipulate certain gas valves. He fumbled and missed and was totally incapable of carrying through his plan. Yet later, in describing how he felt, he was willing to swear that he had turned the handles correctly. His mind was beginning to crack.

Changing the calcium content of the blood will change its consistency. Convulsions, coma, then death is the result of reducing the amount of calcium in the blood stream by half. When the calcium is doubled the blood thickens so it will hardly flow. The mind goes through three stages

—heaviness, indifference, and unconsciousness—before death strikes.

The sugar content of the blood also has a strange effect on the mind of man. Reduce the amount slightly and there is a blotting out of all thought. When sugar is increased a few milligrams to the centimeter, fear seizes the mind. This type of fear is characterized by the fact that it is concerned with only trifles, matters of little consequence to a person in a normal state. Sometimes double images form; the speech becomes thick and garbled. There are mental illusions; things are seen which do not exist.

The blood in composition is slightly alkaline. When it is acidified slightly a coma is the result. The mind is a complete blank. Should the other extreme be attempted and the blood be made more alkaline than it is normally, convulsions and then death occurs.

One of the important constituents of blood that we seldom think about, is water. We would collapse from weakness if just a small amount of water were removed. Additional water than is naturally supplied will cause headaches, nausea, and dizziness.

If the balance of either the chemical or physical substances which go to make up the blood is disturbed, the mind is affected. Some diseases which afflict mankind (such as sugar diabetes) are known to be the result of just such a disturbance. Chemical analysis of blood under the scrutinizing eyes of our foremost research men has brought forward many new forms of treatment for diseases to be administered through the blood stream.

The painstaking labors of these same men of science has brought about a miraculous change in the care of war casualties. In the last war the men didn't have the benefit of plasma. It is a comparatively new discovery. When actual transfusions were impossible, a wounded man died from loss of blood. Now blood, that life-giving, but also treacherous fluid, is where it is needed the most, at the soldier's side.



WHAT MAN

**Immortality needs
your help**

By HOBART M. GIBSON

**We don't want to
die! What if we don't
need to? What if there
is a way to everlasting
life waiting for us?**

THE GROUNDWORK for immortality is finished. The foundation is already laid. Who wants to help with the building?

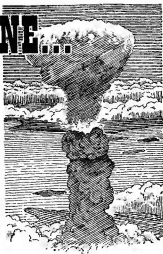
This is a different kind of article, from the usual run. It is an appeal to the readers of *Amazing Stories* for their help. Later on we will come to the explanation of where help is needed, but first let us examine the groundwork and foundation and see if there is, really, a foundation on which to build and no quicksand in the groundwork.

Dr. Alexis Carrel kept animal cells living for five times the natural life of the animal from which they were extracted. He wearied, finally, of the experiment and quit it. He said, "After thirty years the original cells were still living, and if I had not, from time to time, removed the new growth of cells . . . they would by now have covered all of Manhattan Island." He did not stop there. He said, "Given suitable nutrient the body cells would live forever, IF NOT POISONED." At another time he said, "If the body cells were suitably fed and shielded from poison, the pulsation of life . . . so far as we now know . . . WOULD GO ON FOREVER."

Some doctors have sought to confuse the writer. They said, "Granted that the body cells could live forever, if not poisoned, there would still be nerves dying and nerve force diminishing. Immortality is not as simple as you think." The writer's opinion is that immortality is far too simple for those doc-

CAN IMAGINE...

Science fiction has proved itself to be an outlet for man's imagination. What do YOU imagine the future will bring? This department is your opportunity to contribute to progress



tors to comprehend. They are naturally looking for something complicated . . . when they think of a body having immortality.

Here, is the plain, unvarnished truth. The whole body, including the nerves and brain are composed of cells, and are equally subject to be poisoned and equally can be rebuilt by nutrition. Where a man has an attack of lassitude it is because too many nerve cells are killed by poisoning, so that nerve force is hindered from flowing along the nerves to the different parts of the body. As soon as the nerves manage to rebuild and replace the poisoned cells the man's actions and perceptions quicken. Enough of this. Let us look at the poison.

Barring accidental injury, CARBON-MONOXIDE HAS CAUSED ALL ANIMAL DEATH SINCE TIME BEGAN. The reason for man not having already discovered this poison within him is attributable to several facts, the main one being: it and its effects are so hard to discover in the body. A fatal or near-fatal amount breathed in is readily diagnosed by a physician or laboratory test . . . but the small amount generated in the body is not apparent, or if it is, its effects are laid to mal-functioning of the organs or disease or the supposed natural course of life. If a man lives to be one hundred years old and dies a so-called natural death from old age . . . a graph of what has happened inside his body during the one hundred years would be identical with the graph of what

has happened inside the body of a man who died in a few minutes from carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Chemistry says, "Carbon-monoxide is very poisonous. Less than one percent may be instantly fatal if breathed; and one tenth of one percent of the gas is fatal when breathed a sufficient time, varying with the strength and health of the person. The effect is cumulative and therefore dangerous to health." Those two statements, by chemists, show what a deadly poison carbon-monoxide is. If, it is proven beyond any reasonable doubt that it is formed within the body from before birth until death . . . why should anyone doubt that it is the poison that Dr. Carrel spoke of? *

THE science of chemistry is an exact science. No law of nature has ever been broken except when man produced the atomic bomb. That does not have any place in this article, except to show that it took two billion dollars and many years work to break one natural law. Nature has no two billion dollars and unlimited man-power to use to see that each and every man is cheated out of immortality. Man was given immortality; by being given body cells that are capable of living forever . . . if not poisoned.

Chemistry has this to say: "Carbon-monoxide kills the body cells and destroys the iron in the

* Dr. Carrel died before he could finish his work.

bloodstream. It not only kills the cells of the body organs; it breaks down the body organs themselves." Would that explain to you the anaemic condition so common? Anemia is a symptom of old age. An old man cannot run up stairways. He hasn't sufficient iron in his bloodstream. Something is destroying it and keeping it down to a minimum. Then, there is the fact that when a man dies . . . old or young . . . some organ always breaks down. The doctor may say, "His heart just gave out." That does not explain it. The fact is: his heart broke down. Carbon-monoxide had killed too many cells in his heart, so that the pulsation of life could not keep coursing.

The writer realizes, fully, the enormity of the task before him, namely: the breaking of age-old superstitions and the job of trying to open up a path in untrodden grounds. Before this article is finished, facts will be furnished showing just how and where carbon-monoxide is formed in the body, in appreciable amounts, but first remains the job of showing that carbon-monoxide fills the bill in every particular as the causative factor of progressive aging, the death of cells and the slowing of the body organs in their functions.

CHEMISTRY says this, about carbon-monoxide:

"It has a toxic effect on the nervous system, causing a general debility and loss of vitality, the victim becoming nervous, weak and helpless." If a doctor described the condition of a person dying a so-called natural death from old age, he would say: "The patient has a general debility and loss of vitality. He has become nervous, weak and helpless." The coincidence of the symptoms of the two deaths being exactly identical if carbon-monoxide was known to be present in one instance and absent in the other could be very easily explained away. Instead of that . . . carbon-monoxide is present in both cases. In one case, one breath of air with one percent carbon-monoxide to ninety-nine percent oxygen and nitrogen was breathed in. In the other case possibly a thousand or ten thousand times that amount was formed inside the body over the span of years.

Chemistry says: "Carbon-monoxide is odorless, colorless, tasteless and can be detected only by its effects on animal life." Another good reason for its not being discovered as the cause of all of man's ills and deaths is its invisibility to all of the senses. If it was glaringly apparent—as acid is—man would have discovered it, long ago as the thief that was robbing him of immortality. The famous, late Dr. Crile said: "There are no natural deaths. All deaths from so-called natural causes are merely the end-point of a progressive acid saturation." It is a pity that the great Dr. Crile did not become aware of the fact that acid is not the killer. The true killer, by killing the cells of the organs slows them down in their harmonious work so that acid is allowed to accumulate. Acid is formed in a healthy body, just the same as in an unhealthy one. The difference is: in an unhealthy body the acid is not got rid of. It shows up as a coated

tongue and an acid stomach.

One cannot look to the medical profession for immortality. The height of their aim is to increase the span of life. The Atlantic ocean spans the distance between America and England. We do not want a span of life. If there were no oceans, there would be no stopping to the land. One could travel on a straight line, on land, forever. We want to go right on living forever.

Somewhere along animal's evolution (that includes man's) the animal body grew an unnatural, unwanted part to the body and in growing it animal life became mortal. The medical profession has never, satisfactorily, explained the vermiform appendix! It is an atrophied section of the small intestine. The colon started as a stretched place in the side of the intestine. It stretched further, until it became a pouch. The pouch grew and by its weight hung down and pressed on the intestine where the duodenum is now. As the pressure grew, the pouch, at its lower end, grafted itself onto the intestine. The portion of the intestine between the point where the pouch started and where it grafted back onto the intestine was destined to become the appendix; something that the medical profession is always ready to relieve one of.

THERE was, then, two parallel passages through which undigested foodstuff and the body waste had a choice of traveling. The short colon (former pouch) continued to grow in size, thus crowding the parallel portion against the side walls until, finally, all of the excreta was passing through the colon and none through the outmoded portion of intestine. Nature wants to keep on with a habit, once it is started, so to keep the colon growing—it could grow no further downward—the top of the colon began growing upward. It stretched the now useless piece of intestine until it was pulled apart. The severed part was carried up with the ascending colon as it grew, across and down to where it is today.

Nature works in cycles and sometime in the far, distant future the growth of the colon will complete its cycle by grafting on again at the exit of the body. Then, the colon will no longer be used and man will have immortality, but that will be too far off in the future to do us any good.

Man lost immortality by—for some guessable reason—growing a colon. He will regain it when he goes to work on it in earnest; using common sense instead of superstition. Working for it instead of praying for it. Praying for an atomic bomb would not have got us one in a million years. We worked for it and paid for it. The Creator is not petty, not an Indian giver. The Creator wants us to have immortality, NOW.

A true understanding of life is essential to the understanding of the why and how of death. All animal life is based on carbon; dissenting opinions to the contrary cannot change facts. Without carbon in the bloodstream man would live only a very few minutes. With all of the other food-

stuff missing from his bloodstream he might possibly live for several days. Carbon gives heat and movement (life) to the body; by being burned in the body cells in the presence of oxygen in the ratio of one atom of carbon to two atoms of oxygen. That is all there is to immortality.

Death is brought to the cells, and eventually to the body, by carbon being burned in the cells in the ratio of one atom of carbon to one atom of oxygen and one molecule of carbon-monoxide. What would happen to your automobile battery if, after you had it fully charged, you started from there and had the equivalent of another full charge forced in on the other? It would burn the battery out, wouldn't it? That is exactly what happens when carbon-monoxide is burned in the cells. Chemistry says, "Carbon-monoxide is combustible, and will support flame." In other words it causes the cells to burn two atoms of carbon where only one is required or can be handled.

THE writer has been trying for fifteen years to explain to the world that all life is electrical. Recently, more and more, scientists are coming to the same conclusion. The very heart of all matter is electricity. From the heart of matter out to its boundaries there is nothing but pure electricity, therefore carbon has nothing to give to a cell except electricity.

The live, active cells of any animal body are a complete receiving and transmitting station. Each live cell receives an electrical pulsation from the adjoining cell and transmits it on to another cell. That is the pulsation of life that Dr. Carrel spoke of. An immortal body would be one in which every cell would be alert and alive. The brain could be used one hundred percent.

Many cells in a body are dead inactive cells. The pulsation of life is shunted around those cells as long as it is possible to do so. A great many dead cells in a body organ give trouble to the pulsation of life in trying to find its way through the organ. We call that organ, a diseased or ailing organ. When too many cells are dead in a body organ the pulsation of life can no longer find its way through the organ. Then we have a dead organ. Take the pancreas for example. The pancreas, in many instances, has too much work to do. Too much work causes excessive amounts of carbon to be picked up by the cells. In picking up the excessive amount of carbon excessive amounts of carbon-monoxide are picked up. Finally, so many dead cells have accumulated that the pulsation of life is forced to play leap-frog over the organ. Then insulin has another buyer.

Science, if read aright, tells us why every race of humanity has created themselves a hereafter in which they would be immortal. Every man has two minds. The thinking mind and the subconscious mind. Rarely do they seem to contact each other. Some athletic body posers can, just by thinking of it, cause an increased flow of blood to go to any group of muscles that they desire. That shows that there is communication possible

between the two minds. The subconscious mind makes the most of every situation for the good of the body. It knows that the cells of the body are being killed. It knows that the cells should not die. It knows that the body should be immortal. It contacts the conscious mind and tells it that the body has immortality within it. Man, being told that from within and yet seeing all men die, decides that he, too, must die before he can gain his immortality. Hence the religions.

THE writer will be the prosecuting attorney and bring carbon-monoxide before a bar of justice, you to be the jury. The first witness will be the medical profession. Medical science states: "There is a large amount of undigested carbon in the colon at all times. It remains there for forty-eight hours, on an average. Fermentation and decomposition is active there at all times." The next witness is chemistry. Chemistry states: "Whenever carbonaceous material decomposes, by fast or slow combustion, in the absence of sufficient ventilation carbon monoxide forms."

Before questioning the witnesses, the prosecutor wants to impress the jury with the implications of the two witnesses' testimony. The medical profession stated that the colon was at all times carrying a mass of carbon—which means carbonaceous material. It stated that the carbonaceous material stayed there long enough for decomposition to take place. Then chemistry stated that whenever carbonaceous material decomposes in bad air carbon monoxide forms. The jury does not have to be told by expert witnesses that the colon does not have any ventilation at all. The jury does not have to be told that there is no means provided so that the colon can get sufficient oxygen to change the decomposing carbon into the relatively harmless compound, carbon-dioxide.

Now that the jury has to admit that carbon-monoxide is formed in the colon, or else repudiate two things that chemistry and the medical profession will stake their reputations on, the prosecutor will call them back. The medical profession states: "Auto-intoxication is a universal plague. Absorption from the colon into the bloodstream is taking place at all times. Poisonous effete matter is continually being absorbed." Chemistry states: "Carbon-monoxide is absorbed from 250 to 410 times as easily as oxygen into the bloodstream." Now, you of the jury will be asked, by the defense to believe that: *though other poisonous matter may be absorbed from the colon into the bloodstream, the defendant is much, too thoughtful of humanity to allow itself to be absorbed.*

THE defense cross-examines the witnesses. "Medical profession, have you, by tests, determined that the defendant is absorbed into the bloodstream from the colon?" "No, we have made no tests along that line." "Chemistry, do you state that carbon-monoxide is absorbed hundreds of times faster than oxygen from the colon?" "No, we have never tested the comparative rate of

absorption from the colon. In fact, we have made no tests at all along those lines."

This mock trial has gone far enough. Let us see what the chances are of carbon-monoxide being absorbed through the walls of the colon into the bloodstream. In certain diseases where the stomach cannot be used carbonaceous matter is injected into the colon and evidence that it is absorbed lies in the fact that the patient is very well nourished until the stomach can again take food. Under an oxygen tent oxygen is absorbed into the bloodstream even though there is no iron (oxygen carrier) in the bloodstream. Carbon-dioxide is very easily absorbed into the bloodstream. Other poisonous matter is absorbed into the bloodstream through the walls of the colon, so why should not carbon-monoxide be absorbed?

Doctors have told the writer: "Have laboratory tests made, showing that carbon-monoxide is absorbed from the colon and in what amounts, and if they show that a sufficient amount is absorbed to substantiate your claims, then we will help you carry on from there. They might as well have said: 'You hand us immortality on a silver platter, and we will pass it on to the world.' The writer is not rich, has no laboratory, has not the

means to hire laboratory technicians, therefore this article is written with the hope that help will be forthcoming to carry on the work that the writer has spent a lifetime of study and research in starting.

To the average mind carbon-monoxide is associated with the burning of carbon (gas) in an automobile in a tight garage. There is one place where it is formed that compares very favorably with it being formed in the colon. That is in a waste place—where refuse coal is piled—in a coal mine where there is little ventilation. The U.S. Bureau of Mines' chemistry department says: "Carbon-monoxide is formed in the waste places in mines where the decomposition of the carbon in coal is taking place in the absence of, or where there is little, ventilation." Those waste places must be sealed off from the rest of the mine or else be ventilated. That is the law. By all rights of humanity it should be the law that the colon be sealed off or be ventilated.

The colon has become such an intimate part of the body that it cannot be sealed off or removed, so what can be done except ventilate it in some way?

THE END

TALES FROM TIBET

★

By VINCENT H. GADDIS

★

BYOND the white peaks of the Himalayas lies the least known of all civilized countries—Tibet. Foreigners are not welcome in this mysterious and forbidden land. Cradled in the heart of an antiquity that drops deep into a dark and bewildering past, Tibet has been the source of strange and startling reports—tales of radiations of evil from isolated towers, a vast underground city containing complex machinery and extending a political influence, and occult feats that are almost incredible.

Recent archeological discoveries have established the fact that the Hindu civilization is the oldest on earth, at least 2000 years older than the Chinese, and the Aryans, who invaded the territory about 1000 B. C., simply broke into and occupied a small part of an ancient civilization that was then in decay. This older civilization at its height extended north of India into Tibet and Mongolia, and it was doubtless a part of the Uigur Empire.

The Uighurs, according to Col. James Churchward and Chinese legends, attained the height of their culture about 17,000 years ago, and their empire extended across all of Central Asia. It was the principal colonial empire belonging to Mu or Lemuria, the lost continent of the Pacific. The capital city was located northeast of Tibet in what is now the Gobi Desert, then a fertile area of land.

Against this background of boary antiquity, sealed off from the world by its highest mountains

for long millenniums, Tibet has guarded its records and secrets well. Hooded, yellow-robed monks, down in the subterranean cells of their mountain monasteries, have probed deep into the mysteries of nature and existence. In their possession are the records of a long-gone era of great knowledge, and Col. Churchward tells of seeing a Tibetan tablet displaying an airplane. Evolution is not a new theory to the Tibetan monks; it is one of their oldest legends. It is a matter of authentic record that two years before the Armistice of 1918 the Oracle of Tibet prophesied the year and the month on which World War I would end.

But the influence of Tibet is sinister. Its occult philosophy is not the light of hope and encouragement offered by the yoga systems of the East Indians; it is black. "From the heart of the Himalayas, went the Buddhist missionaries into Tibet, fighting the dark, Central Asian magic. Eventually, Central Asia won. From Tibet today radiate, as those who really know are aware, currents of sheer evil. Not in Tibet can salvation be found," writes Michael Pym in her book *The Power of India*.

To those who really know—currents of sheer evil! What can this mean? Perhaps a clue is found in the weird report of William B. Seabrook in his book *Adventures in Arabia*. He was told that "stretching across Asia, from northern Manchuria, through Tibet, west through Persia, and

ending in the Kurdistan, was a chain of seven towers, on isolated mountain-tops; and in each of these towers a priest of Satan, who by 'broadcasting' occult vibrations, controlled the destinies of the world for evil."

SEABROOK learned that the knowledge of these towers was possessed by almost all students of black magic throughout the Orient. Then he learned the exact location of one of these "power-houses," as they are called. The Yezides, a sect of devil-worshippers scattered in the Orient, feared and hated by Moslem and Christian alike, are strongest in North Arabia. At their stronghold in the mountains north of Baghdad, on the Kurdish border, near Mosul, was a Tower of Evil—a high, cone-shaped structure with bright rays flashing from its pinnacle. Here the image of the peacock was worshipped.

Arriving at the village of Sheik-Adi, Seabrook went to the outskirts and beheld the tower. Inside was a temple, but no altar was visible. Rites, lasting for many days, were sometimes held in the dome of the tower, he learned. However, the tower was bare, and except for his guide he noticed no inhabitants. He got as far as entering a rock-bewn room beneath the tower, and then he learned that there were subterranean caverns below him which he was not allowed to enter.

How are these radiations of evil sent forth to the world? Seabrook thinks they are telepathic, but if the report is true, the exact method of releasing these radiations is not known. And what or where is the primary source of this Tibetan evil? Is it the work and teachings of a group of monks in mountain monasteries, or is there a deeper, more subtle, origin?

Perhaps it is Agharti! In a flight across Mongolia from the Reds in Russia in 1918, Dr. Ferdinand Ossendowski discovered the story of Agharti, a huge subterranean city beneath Tibet and Outer Mongolia. The story will be found in his book, *Beasts, Men and Gods*, published in 1922. The existence of Agharti is widely known among the natives of Central Asia, but very few know the exact location of its carefully-guarded entrance.

This secret city of the caverns is ruled by an individual known as the "King of the World," and he actually has a political influence on events in Mongolia and Tibet today. His name is spoken with fear. The present Bogdo Khan (Living Buddha) of Outer Mongolia, in his palace at Urga, has copper plates bearing messages from this mysterious ruler. Other Living Buddhas and Tashi Lamas have received instructions from him. On infrequent occasions he makes visits to the surface, and he has appeared at the Sakka Monastery and at Nambranchi Kure. His agents on the surface are active throughout Tibet, Inner and Outer Mongolia, and in Sinkiang.

AGHARTI is supposed to be a vast, underground region containing several thousand inhabitants. Science has been greatly developed;

plants are grown by the aid of a special light, and cars travel through the caverns at great speeds. Dr. Ossendowski writes that travelers he has met have told of seeing the tracks of unknown cars high in mountain passes above the snow-line. Although the entrances to this hidden city are well-protected, a number of men—among them Sakka Mouni, Under Gheghen, Khan Baher, Pasha, and other political figures—have made visits there with special permission. It is said that Baron Ungern, who later lost his life fighting the Soviet forces in 1918, sent the young Prince Pousaig to seek Agharti. The prince never returned.

The story of Agharti is by no means a myth; there is a basis for these reports that is startling in its implications. So fear-inspiring is any reference to the cavern city and its ruler, that Dr. Ossendowski obtained his information with the utmost difficulty, and then only because he had the confidence of his informants. One of them, the *Abbot* of the Nambranchi Monastery, early in 1921, showed Dr. Ossendowski a throne room and told him the following story:

One winter night in 1890 several horsemen rode up to the monastery and demanded that all the monks gather in this room. One of the strangers removed his face-covering and sat upon the throne. It was the "King of the World," described in the sacred bulls of Dalai Lama, Tashi Lama, and Bogdo Khan—the man who has penetrated into all the secrets of Nature. He made a prediction of events for the coming half-century, and events have occurred as he foretold them. During his talk the candles lighted, doors opened of their own accord, and from the secret basins poured streams of incense.

Later, as the *lamas* prayed, Dr. Ossendowski saw in a dark space behind a statue of Buddha a vision of his family and friends form from thin threads of light. Details were sharp and clear. Friends with the doctor also witnessed this appearance. "In order that I might have the evidence of others," wrote the doctor, "on this impressive vision, I asked them to make protocols or affidavits concerning what they saw. This they did and I now have these statements in my possession."

Are we to regard this vision as a psychic experience or a phenomenon produced by concealed machinery? Whatever the answer, Dr. Ossendowski later found that his friends were actually doing the things that they were pictured as doing at the time of the vision.

TIBET—a country of secrets—William McGovern, who made a famous trip to its capital, Lhasa, in disguise, states that "even new institutions, such as the post and telegraph, are employed as efficient means of keeping the European intruder out, as in this way constant communication between the frontier and the capital is insured." And now we have linked the territory of Tibet with earth's oldest cultures, extending back to Lemuria, with an underground city, and with

radiations of evil.

Tibet—a country of confusion—its religion a mixture of Buddhism, Sivaism, and Shamanism, with the ever-present dark pattern of black magic in the background. Burnouf, in his translation of the Lama Tantra books of Tibet, wrote: "My pen refuses to transcribe doctrines as miserable in respect of form as they are odious and degrading in respect of meaning."

Ignoring the external, sensible world, the Tibetan monks, however, have not neglected the development of the inner world—the mind of man and its powers. A number of strange reports of observations in Tibet have been made in recent years by occasional visitors. Major Yeats-Brown has told of seeing a resurrection of the dead take place twice, and his story has been confirmed by Dr. Alexander Cannon, a London psychiatrist, who

also witnessed the apparent miracle.

Mme. Alexandre David-Neel, a French Buddhist, spent fourteen years in Tibet and her book *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* is a mine of material on Tibetan feats. Some of the phenomena she describes are very suggestive, and include the ability to produce fire by the mental images of mystic syllables, instant communication by telepathy, the affecting of material objects by "charging" them with mental energy over periods of time, the levitation of the human body, the ability to make oneself invisible, and the mental production of "thought-forms" or doubles. She reports that at the time of the flight of the Tashi Lama from Szigatze, during a minor revolution, he left a "double" of himself behind in his palace which vanished when he was safely over the border.

THE END



RADIO'S STRANGEST MYSTERY



ON THE night of August 22, 1924, the planet Mars approached to within thirty-four and a half million miles from the earth—the nearest it will come until the year 2,000. Huge telescopic batteries were trained on the brilliant red orb beyond. Radio broadcasting stations were silenced, and scientists listened for a possible message from across the void of outer space.

Suddenly, in the midst of the etheric silence, came mysterious signals from an unknown origin. Station WOR at Newark, N. J., was the first listening post to report. Other stations followed. And in Washington, D. C., a photographic film record of the impulses was being made that is as much an enigma today as the night twenty years ago when it was recorded.

Plans for the experiment had been carefully made. Dr. David Todd, professor emeritus of astronomy at Amherst College, was the organizer of the international "listening in" test. At Dr. Todd's suggestion the United States government, through channels of diplomacy, requested that all countries with high-power transmitters silence their stations for five minutes every hour from 11:50 p. m. August 21 to 11:50 p. m. August 23.

C. Francis Jenkins, of Washington, D. C., had only recently invented a radio photo message continuous transmission machine, and he was asked by Dr. Todd to take a record of any signals received during the experiment. The recording device was attached to a receiving set adjusted to a wave-length of 6,000 meters. Incoming signals caused flashes of light which were printed on the film by an instrument passing over its surface from side to side. The film was in the form of a roll of tape, thirty feet long and six inches wide, and it was slowly unwound under the instrument and light bulb which responded to the transmitted sounds.

The Jenkins device was in operation for a period of about thirty hours during all moments of si-

lence while Mars was closest to the earth. Then the film was developed, and on August 27 the astonished experimenters called in newspaper reporters. The film disclosed in black on white a fairly regular arrangement of dots and dashes along one side, but on the other side, at almost evenly spaced intervals, were curiously jumbled groups each taking the form of a crudely drawn human face.

The inventor didn't think that Mars was the cause of the phenomenon, but "the film shows a repetition at intervals of about a half hour of what appears to be a man's face, and it's a freak which we can't explain." Although admitting that he was at a loss to explain its significance, Dr. Todd took a more serious view. "We now have a permanent record which can be studied and who knows, until we have studied it, just what these signals may have been?", he told newsmen.

Army code experts worked on the film for some weeks without reaching any decisions, and a copy of the film was given to the radio division of the Bureau of Standards. The film had only deepened the mystery of the dots and dashes reported heard by widely separated operators of powerful stations.

News dispatches of August 23 announced that R. I. Fottelle, chief engineer of Station WOR, Newark, N. J., between 7:30 and 10 o'clock on the preceding evening, received a series of dots and dashes that belonged neither to the Morse nor Continental codes. The signals were steadily repeated. After hours of study, the engineer decided that the word being transmitted was "Eunza." The word has no meaning in the languages of earth.

THREE years before the Mars experiment, the first report of mysterious signals was made by Signor Marconi himself, the father of wireless. In September, 1921, J. C. H. MacBeth, London manager of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company,

arrived in New York and told reporters that Marconi believed he had intercepted messages from Mars or some point in outer space.

The signals, MacBeth said, had been received while Marconi was on his yacht in the Mediterranean Sea conducting atmospheric experiments with wireless. Magnetic wave-lengths high in the meter band had been picked up, although the maximum length of earth-produced waves at that time was 14,000 meters. The theory that the waves were produced by electrical disturbances was disproved by the regularity of the impulses. Although the impulses apparently consisted of a code, the only signal similar to earth codes was one resembling the letter V in the Marconi code.

In the following years, as radio was developed, a number of interesting discoveries were made. L. W. Chubb, director of research for the Westinghouse Electric Company, in announcing the perfection of beam radio transmission, stated that if communication with Mars was ever established, it would have to be with ultra-short waves directed like a beam of light in order to penetrate the atmospheric layers above the earth's surface. Ultra-short waves are the nearest approach of radio waves to regular light waves.

The Heaviside-Kennelly layer is about 70 miles above the surface. At double that height is the Appleton layer. These are layers of ionized gas that reflect radio waves. The Heaviside-Kennelly layer reflects medium waves and the Appleton layer the short waves. Beam transmission experiments, however, were made by the Danish expert, Håk, and two Scandinavian scientists, Stormer and Peterson, and they found that certain short waves penetrate both layers and travel far out into space. Their signal echoes arrived from three to thirty seconds after transmission.

Since the velocity of radio waves is the same as light—186,000 miles per second—it was obvious that the "layers" or bodies that reflected these signals were located at from 280,000 to 2,800,000 miles from the earth. Apparently even these "layers" far out into space could be penetrated by a beamed wave approaching a regular light wave which passes through all ionized barriers.

Plans for a regular light beam signal were made by Harry Price, director of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, England, in 1910, but the project was abandoned due to insufficient funds. The site selected was the summit of Jungfrauoch in the Bernese Oberland, 11,000 feet above sea level. Ten tons of magnesium was to be ignited in oxygen in the focus of reflectors, and the beam directed on the snowfields of the Martian pole. This colossal flare, it was believed, would certainly bring a response if there were intelligent beings on the mystery planet.

An attempt to contact Mars by radio was made in October, 1928, by Mansfield Robinson, a London lawyer, through the Rugby Station in England. The message was sent on an 18,700 meter wave-length, and it was hoped that some sort of etheric response might be heard.

A few minutes after Robinson's message went out through space, Prof. A. M. Low, famous English scientist who was listening in, received a series of signals on his radio. "It was a mysterious message," Prof. Low was quoted as stating. "It is hardly likely that it could have come from Mars. However, I must confess that I do not know who sent it. It was a series of dots and dashes."

WEIRD static impulses that emerge through the loud speaker with a steady hissing sound are coming from a swarm of stars in the Milky Way, but their cause is unknown. It is believed that they may be produced by stellar radiation similar to the cosmic rays.

But it is the story of mysterious signals that may have come from the planet Mars that remains radio's strangest mystery. The spectro-scope reveals that Mars has an atmosphere, somewhat rarified, but containing the aqueous vapor that is so necessary to support life. Its surface is practically level, mountains being unknown, and the white patches at the poles increase and diminish with the Martian seasons. However, the deposits of ice and snow in the planet's polar regions are less than those on the earth, and sometimes they disappear entirely. The climate is much colder than that of earth. There are annual changes of color on parts of the surface that strongly suggest the existence of vegetable life.

In 1877, G. V. Schiaparelli, director of the Milan Observatory, noticed that many of the dark markings on Mars are joined together by a network of fine lines. It was these lines, the so-called "canals," that have caused so much discussion. It is estimated that they have a uniform breadth of from ten to twenty miles, extending from a few hundred to 3,000 miles. They appear always to run in straight lines, taking the shortest route from point to point. The late Dr. Percival Lowell, founder of the observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona that bears his name, believed that the canals were of artificial origin, and he pointed out that Mars has little, if any, rainfall, which together with the lack of mountains and rivers would create a water famine.

Intelligent beings would create this huge irrigation enterprise to spread the water of the melting polar caps over the planet's surface. The canals are undoubtedly connected with the Martian seasons, disappearing in winter and reappearing in the spring and summer, and this leads to the belief that what is actually observed is the vegetation growing along the sides of the canals in the desert areas through which they pass.

These mysterious markings have been observed and mapped over a period of many years. Then, in April, 1938, at a meeting of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Dr. V. M. Slipher, director of the Lowell Observatory, startled the assembled scientists when he announced that he had found "evidence of changes in the canal system of Mars, as if their pattern had been altered by design."

Vincent H. Gaddis

THE SHAVER MYSTERY

IN AN unbelievable number of *Amazing Stories'* readers the so-called Shaver Mystery has struck a responsive chord which has been perhaps one of the most mysterious phases of the whole affair. It struck such a chord in me.

Over a year ago I completed research which left me in possession of certain things. These things were: (1) the rudiments of a new hydrodynamic mathematics which (a) involved the multiple integration of certain fundamental equations before arriving at the starting point of conventional hydrodynamics, and (b) eliminated the sources of error in conventional theory entirely; (2) a system of analysis far superior to the scientific method, of which the scientific method is in reality an incomplete part; (3) the solution to the fundamental nature of the universe in explicit and demonstrable form which, coupled with the new hydrodynamics and the new system of analysis, will put all science on the same foundation of logical perfection and exactness as is mathematics and geometry itself.

This solution made it possible to determine and prove beyond any possibility of doubt the nature of gravity and the electron and proton fields, what the electron and the proton are, what light is, why light travels 186,000 miles per second, what happens in complete detail when matter disintegrates, how and where matter is synthesized, the process by which the sun can keep on throwing off heat indefinitely, the size and age of the universe, and, in short, every detailed phase of the fundamental processes of the universe!

Now, I was in possession of all this over a year ago,—and much more. BUT I hesitated to make public my knowledge or discoveries for many reasons. The most important was the certainty that publication and acceptance by the scientific world would result immediately in the construction of the atomic bomb. Secondary in immediate importance, but primary in over-all importance, would have been the philosophical and religious repercussions certain to follow.

As I look back now I realize that it would have been impossible for me to have arrived at the theoretical knowledge I possessed at that time without first being an atheist and a complete materialist in my fundamental beliefs. And such I was.

But there were the remnants of a peculiar and illogical set of beliefs still remaining in my makeup which I had not been able to either erase or rationalize. What were these beliefs? Surprising as it may seem the vast majority of you readers who have written to Mr. Palmer and Mr. Shaver have similar or even identical beliefs!

I had the conviction that I had not *discovered*

all this knowledge I possessed, although I had certainly figured it all out, laboriously, and with lots of mistakes and wrong starts. The glory really belonged to some "unknown" who had been very patient and long-suffering with the stupid and dense mentality he had to deal with in me.

This conviction was only one of many in my makeup which I had all my life attempted to deny and rationalize out of existence because they were illogical, had no basis in demonstrable fact, and were, in short, insane. In giving them now I do not assert that they actually do have any basis in fact.

My oldest and most persistent conviction of childhood and adolescence was that I was not the child of my professed parents. This conviction persisted even though my parents assured me many times during my childhood that I really was their child. It was strong enough to cause me to look up my birth record and check up later in life. I was left with incontrovertible proof that I actually am the child of my professed parents, and also the still persistent conviction that I am not.

In my earliest memories, when I was around two to three years of age, I was able to "see" creatures around the house who stood silently, watching, with enormous eyes. Creatures which I pointed out to my mother and attempted to describe, but which neither she nor anyone else could see, even when I pointed right at them and described them. Night after night they were there, and I would push a chair up to the window and climb up on it to watch them.

MUCH has been said of recurrent dreams. There are several in my life, but only one of unusual intensity and "mysterious" importance.

In this dream I am walking down a hall or corridor. In my mind I know I have just left an important meeting or conference. I say "in my mind" because I am not thinking of the meeting, just as you, if you had just gotten off the bus and were walking to the sidewalk would be aware that you had just been on the bus, but would not be thinking about it particularly.

In the same way I know that on the other side of the right wall of this corridor is a library filled with books. I go from the corridor into a large room, cross this room to a hole in the floor, drop through this hole deliberately, and that is the end of the dream.

I am left with the feeling that the act of dropping through this hole is of tremendous importance, and that I did it because of a decision reached by that familiar group I had just left.

I will not attempt to explain the dream's meaning myself. That is the beauty of this type of

mystery. Each reader will "explain" it in his own way. The believer in Shaver's cave people will explain it as a thought record. The reincarnationist will explain it as a memory of a previous life. The disbeliever in both will explain it as a dream having formulative factors which were implanted on my mind from perfectly natural everyday life.

Being, by my early twenties, a thorough materialist and atheist, believing man has no immortal soul, and that the universe is—just the universe, with no God nor any supernatural thing, these abnormal quirks in my mental growth which persisted in spite of everything naturally bothered me.

My introverted study of myself had presented me with a problem which, rather than approaching a solution, seemed to grow more unresolvable as the years passed. And when, early in 1944, I sat back in my mental easy chair with the solution to the mystery of existence, life, thought, gravity, electricity, light, etc. in my mental lap, I felt sure that at long last I was rid of those vague disturbances, those mysterious mileposts in my thirty-five years of existence. I had good reason to feel that way.

Then, as if to mock my self-satisfaction, the feeling grew disturbing that I had not discovered what I knew, but merely learned it! And why did I bother about the religious, philosophical, political, and industrial ramifications of my discoveries when published? Why couldn't I just get my work published and sit back and wait for the results?

I didn't know, so I just marked time. And in a way I enjoyed it. I could look clearly into the future and see scientists solving mathematical problems with sure results, instead of performing endless, semi-blind experiments. All the laws of nature known with logical exactness, instead of the uncertain and mostly incorrect generalizations from relatively crude experiment and data tables. The vast fields of speculation about nature wiped out forever by sure and detailed logical structure, backed by proof after proof. The universities of the twenty-first century devoted entirely to the teaching of this work and its development by scientists, mathematicians, engineers, philosophers, etc., during the next fifty years. If I were an egomaniac I would have felt like a god, holding the destiny of the world in my lap. But instead, I had the conviction that I had only *learned* what I knew, and that I was just a stupid mortal, and just one little cog in—what?

ALL of this brings me up to the beginning of the Shaver Mystery. I, like many thousands of others, bought the issue of AMAZING STORIES containing "I Remember Lemuria," and read the story. Not because some voice told me to, but because I often read that magazine. My reaction, if I had thought about it, would have appalled me.

I wrote a letter to Mr. Shaver which did not get past Mr. Palmer, but brought a response as

phenomenal as the letter. A rapid-fire correspondence ensued. That correspondence, if it had gotten into the hands of an alienist, would have put me [if not your editor!] in a nut house for keeps. If I had had time to study my own letters and draw logical conclusions from them I would probably have given myself up voluntarily.

Now I can ask myself, did I write those letters? I did and I didn't. In them I gave Mr. Palmer the works. The complete theory. I also told him many things which could only be rationally put down to a newborn faculty of fantastic imagination! At the same time I seemed to have powers of expression which I never possessed before, and a new awareness and intelligence.

Perhaps the most fantastic single fact of the whole Shaver Mystery is Mr. Palmer's sending me five hundred dollars out of his own pocket which, to quote him, I could consider as a gift or a loan or in any way I saw fit, to pay him a visit. And I did pay him that visit in April of this year.

The things I learned would, and probably will eventually, fill a volume by themselves. I will not dwell on them here. When I left I carried in my bag a book which I consider of far more importance than even Shaver's writings in the over-all Shavery Mystery.

In this book, as I read it on the train, I discovered my solution to the nature of the universe given in great detail and some of it much farther advanced than mine in its development! In addition, there were statements about things in the so-called "spirit" world that were, to say the least, staggering.

The revelations in this book are not couched in conventional terms with modern, exact definitions. Such precise terminology did not exist when the book was written and many of the concepts even were completely unknown to all living human beings on the surface of the earth in 1882 when the book was published.

Considering only the aspects of the book on which I was qualified to pass judgment, I was forced to draw a stupendous conclusion; namely, that in 1882 there existed a large number of intelligent, reasoning beings who knew at that time the true nature of the universe which I had determined in 1944 after fifteen or so years of hard work, and that they were not citizens of any country on earth nor were they even human beings in the usual sense of the word. I was forced to this conclusion because the statements they made could not possibly have been made at the time the book was published by any living man on the earth!

The book I am talking about is *Oskay*, published by Kosmos Publications at 2210 W. 11th St., Los Angeles, Cal., and sells for five dollars, in case you want to send for one. Some of the authors of this book are actually older than this earth we live on! How do we know? All I can say is that you'll find out. All you have to do is study the book.

IN *Oakey* there are historical proofs of the authenticity of its contents. Thousands of statements which could not possibly have been made by any "surface" man in 1882 when the book was published: on history, evolution, science, and other subjects. And these statements are made quite casually; as casually as you might say you heard something over the radio this morning.

It is this casual statement of, in many instances, still unknown fact that makes the book easily misinterpreted. Yet the certainty of misinterpretation is taken into account. Every important fact stated in *Oakey* THAT WILL BE NEEDED TO PROVE THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BOOK is deliberately repeated in many places and couched in different terms so that a possible misinterpretation of one statement is definitely ruled out by another statement.

Oakey was written for one primary purpose and that main purpose is directly connected with the Shaver Mystery! Or vice versa. Perhaps now you can begin to see the scope of this mystery.

There is this book, *Oakey*, written before 1882, published, and carried on, year after year,—written by intelligent beings who consider any one of their members who is only a thousand or two years old as an inexperienced pup. Written because the Shaver Mystery was foreseen, and written then because it could not fulfill its purpose if it were written even twenty years later.

There is Dick Shaver himself who is beyond question in mental contact with what he calls the ray or cave people, the deros and teros who, he claims, inhabit the system of caves and tunnels that spread all over the earth a few miles below the surface.

There is your editor who believes he has a special mission in life connected with the Shaver Mystery, and it is quite evident that the Shaver Mystery would never have gotten to first base without him!

There is myself, and you now have a word picture of me and my development.

There is the certainty that by 1947 the public will be in complete possession of the knowledge of how the universe works and of what it is made.

There is the vast number of people who read Dick's and Ray's composite story, "*I Remember Lemuria*," and reacted just as instinctively to it as I; who feel that they too have a part to play in the drama that is now unfolding.

There are the machines that Dick describes, and many others of you also describe independently of him. Machines that do not exist on the surface of the earth, whose principles are unknown, yet which CAN be built whether they ever have or not.

And finally, we have Dick's original manuscript upon which the story, "*I Remember Lemuria*," was built, and which he claims is the actual translation of the telonium plates left by Mutan Mion thousands of years ago!

What does it all add up to? It adds up to something quite simple, but almost too vast for comprehension. The race of Man is entering the art of his ascending spiral of evolution or development in which he will reach adulthood. He is about to take his place in the community of the universe as an adult, with his eyes finally open, a true knowledge of the workings of the universe around him, and his own nature. With machines that will give him power he never dreamed of, and abilities surpassing the farthest reaches of his imagination!

In concluding this open letter I want to say only this: The change from adolescence—that period in which man learns by blind groping in vast laboratories; the period in which wars are fought on a vast scale, blind wars, fought for vague, undefined reasons; the period in which there are a million philosophies and as many religions, when a large percentage of the population eventually finds itself behind bars in the penitentiary or the nut house; and an equally large percentage spends most of its days in a struggle for the bare necessities of life—the change from that adolescent period in Man's development is about to take place. It is taking place now. Read and study. Play your part in it if you have a part. But at least read, because the Shaver Mystery is going to develop into the greatest drama of all time.

ROGER PHILIP GRAHAM

LEMURIA REMEMBERS

*Out of remembered voids which command
Scattering galaxies in a sweep;
Out of the dizzy depths where the mind
Wanders in a primordial sleep;
Out of infinity—OR BEYOND—
Come the potential tryst men must keep.
From the Lemurian record of time
Where cosmic elders crystallized love;
From microscopic secrets in slime
On Prolaza's aqueous floor;
From atmospheric realms of the dream
Come the great challenge: Man must learn more!
Lemuria challenges you to awake and regain
The mastery over those powers enslaving the brain.*

W. FRANCIS POTTER

REMEMBER LEMURIA?

*In neglected Lemurian lore, all life is one;
Good and evil expresses the incandescent Sun,
Life and knowledge approaches the zenith of its
power
And evaporates in the malignant hour.
Remember Lemuria? No man can deny
The record beneath his feet or penned in the sky.
The Lemurian elders enjoyed a buoyant truth
By permitting traditional questioning from youth.
"He who dominates, Watch!" For the living shall
be free,
Shedding ignorance only when heart and mind
agree.
Remember Lemuria? Impressions remain,
Revealing their depths to a more sensitive brain.*

W. FRANCIS POTTER

DISCUSSIONS



AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

ORIGIN OF THE PAWPAW

Sirs:

In the June issue of *AMAZING STORIES* you call for someone to help with your "Scientific Mystery" by tracing down the origin of the Pawpaw. I happen to be interested in such rare fruits incidental to my scientific work and I have some Pawpaw seeds in my laboratory now. Comparing them with the seed of the South American fruit, the Cherimoya, it takes close scrutiny to see any difference in them at all. Besides being the same color, shape and size, they have the peculiar characteristic of bearing a wide difference in size and shape of seed, in the same fruit. The meaty inside has the same identical peculiarity in that both of them are deeply laminated, like a little brain except much deeper. It is practically impossible to tell the difference in the seed.

You may already know the relationships of plants and trees is betrayed by the seeds and the seed parts. These are used to classify the parts, in fact they are the basis of classification.

While the Pawpaw is classified as the *Asimina triloba*, and the Cherimoya is classified as *Annona cherimola*, it is my opinion that there is a much closer relationship between the two. They have the peculiar habit in common of bearing a wide variety of fruit from seedling trees, and the well-known habit of the Pawpaw of growing most of the trees bearing inedible fruit, has given rise to the saying: "Anyone who ever tasted a bad one never wants another Pawpaw." The same is true of the Cherimoya.

The native home of the Cherimoya is in Ecuador, and it has only recently been given any attention by the people of the Estados Unidos.

I would not want to be sure of this, but it is my opinion that the difference in the classification of the tree is a survival of the classification confusion that prevailed throughout botany until a few years ago. I believe that both fruits belong to the Annonaceae group. The Pawpaw would be the natural one of the group for the Indians to have transplanted to the North, because the other Annonaceae could not stand the cold. The Cherimoya freezes at F27.

The Pawpaw could easily have died out in the Ecuadorian homeland because it is so tricky, and so hard to propagate and difficult to grow and no

one knows yet what to do for them.

Briefly summed up, the seed of a plant is the key to its relationship and ancestry, and the seeds of the Pawpaw, and the seeds of the Cherimoya from Ecuador, are practically identical.

Travelers who have had a chance to compare the fruits of the world, are unanimous in saying that the Cherimoya is the world's loveliest fruit.

I. R. Conklin,
3353 Wilson Ave.,
Oakland 2, Calif.

Thank you, Mr. Conklin, for this very illuminating information at per our request for help.—Ed.

GLAD TO BE OF SERVICE

Sirs:

Since you published my letter in *AMAZING STORIES* September issue which was released last June, I have received many inquiries re my original thesis entitled "Mysterious Gravitation, A New Field Theory." I should like to inform those interested that I now have a complete series of four similar theses including the above, the first, which covers the incidence of atomic energy as outlined in my first thesis, and to its final application in the atomic bomb. These theses are all written in terms of a simplified math logic, mainly in words, and not hard to understand by anyone with ordinary intelligence and education. I shall be glad to send literature to anyone interested, on request.

J. P. Kayne,
4518 Clarendon Ave.,
Chicago 40, Illinois

We are always glad to be of service to readers who have done original thinking, and wish to contact other readers with their work.—Ed.

WARN MR. HANSEN . . .

Sirs:

You speak of a great danger. Yes, there is a very great danger, maybe even greater than you think. I do not mean the deroes, but the Citadel or great hidden city of Chihuahua, and the Pit of Quetzilcoatl known by some as Momicite. But Momicite is not the great danger although it is real enough, because Chihuahua is now over 400 years old and in old Sonora.

Yes, there are still Aztecs today and Toltecs also, but even if Momeite is released from the Pit as the Aztecs plan to do, I do not worry about it because the Black Legion, which are certain Indians that are not even registered, and which are on watch at present, and I cannot tell you of the (deleted word, for security reasons—Ed.) right now. There are some things that I dare not tell.

But what I fear most of all I cannot speak about.

My good friend, please tell Mr. Hansen, if you can possibly get hold of him, to stay away from (place deleted for reader's protection) that is tabu. Death only waits for white men there. I knew of the (deleted) 15 years ago and I know that there is gold and other precious things there. It is near the edge of Death Valley, not in the Panamints. And I know how to get in and out, but I have stayed away because they say it is not yet ready. If Mr. Hansen has gone there alone you will never see him again.

You can go to Shasta, or Rainer, or to Lassen, but keep away from (deleted).

Don't get confused between the Lemurians and the old Gods, the evil ones and Hature on Callisto. Please print this or anything to keep Hansen safe.

Wastayhmowinan (Lighten our darkness).

Kakeka Mens Kakeka.

(address withheld)

This letter from an Indian, has been very sharply edited, since he gives definite names and places, and in order to prevent the more venturesome of our readers following Mr. Hansen into his danger (from whom we have no word to date). We sincerely hope that Mr. Hansen (author of our Scientific Mysteries, and noted scientist and explorer) is safe, but there is nothing we can do now if he is not. We are unable to pay your warning on to him, or to reach him, or trace him. As for

your information, you can be sure that we will be sure that we will keep it safe.—Ed.

APPLY THE ALPHABET

Sirs:

A. Hyatt Verrill gives the names of 19 Maya month signs. Apparently they tell a story of man's banishment, but seem to hint of a prophecy that someday he will again find his true place.

Pop—power, source, power

Uo—you, source

Zip—banished, self, power

Zotz—banished, source, gives, nothing

Tzec—gives, no, changes, see

Xul—conflict, you, life

Yaxkin—why, animal, conflict, spirit, self, knows

Mol—male, source, life

Chen—see, human, changes, knows

Yax—why, animal, conflict

Zac—banished, animal, sees

Ceh—sees, changes, human

Mac—male, animal, sees

Kankin—spirit, animal, knows, spirit, self, knows

Muan—male, you, animal, knows

Pax—power, animal, conflict

Kayab—spirit, animal, why, animal, born

Cumhu—sees, you, male, human, you

Uyeyb—You, animal, why, changes, born

W. J. McGoffin,

401 N. Oak,

Pratt, Kansas.

Yes, reading straight through, you get a certain conviction that what is being said here is such a story of banishment as you suggest. Maybe other readers know more about this seemingly universal hidden message in alphabets, which you have now demonstrated also holds true with Mr. Shaver's amazing alphabet.—Ed.

"TRADE YOUR TROUBLE FOR A BUBBLE"

By Alexander Blade

(See Back Cover)

NOW that atomic energy is coming, we have asked artist James B. Settles to picture for us one of the developments in amusement to which it might be put. He surprised us with this huge rolling cross-country pleasure ball.

With atomic energy, it has been postulated that man will have many leisure hours that he never had before. He will have most of the day to pursue as he pleases, either for pleasure, or in pursuit of a hobby, or in art, or in just plain being lazy.

Now, envisioning this future leisure-rich man casting about for a way to pass the day pleasantly, he might see an advertisement in his television set which might go something like the title of this article and of Settles' cover—"Trade Your Trouble for a Bubble" and decide to go sightseeing across

the country in this giant rolling ball of transparent plastic, balanced by interior gyro stabilizers controlling a suspended cocoon which ever remains erect as it travels around its giant "track-ring."

This ring is magnetic, and powered by the atom, revolves along the roadway, which is a specially magnetized roadway. The same power that makes the ball move forward (or backward) acts for stopping the ball. There are no huge motors, no complicated apparatus, just the simplest of gadgets, and a complex and very interesting interior which is the last word in pleasure palaces: Games, terraces, ramps, restful lounging places, dance floors, swimming pools and just plain sightseeing would make this huge ball a pleasant place to whiff away a day.



MAKING YOUR WISHES COME TRUE...

One wish has been fulfilled. Won by 3½ years of deadly struggle. With God's help, we have prevailed.

Now we have a chance to make another wish come true. For most of us, the outlook is a bright one. If we will simply use the brains, the will, the energy, the enterprise . . . the materials and resources . . . with which we won our war, we can't fail to win the peace and to make this the richest, happiest land the world has known.

Your wishes have been wrapped in that bright outlook. Your wish for a cottage by a lake. For your boy's col-

lege education. For a trip you long to take. For a "cushion" against emergencies and unforeseen needs.

You can make those wishes come true by buying bonds today . . . buying them regularly . . . and holding on to them in spite of all temptation.

There's no safer, surer investment in the world. You can count on getting back \$4 for every \$3 you put in E Bonds—as surely as you can count on being a day older tomorrow.

So why not be patriotic and smart at the same time?

**FULFILL YOUR WISH—BUY EXTRA BONDS
IN THE GREAT VICTORY LOAN!**

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

*This is an official U. S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under
auspices of Treasury Department and War Advertising Council*

"TRADE YOUR TROUBLE FOR A BUBBLE"



The world of tomorrow may see science progressed to the point where mankind will have a great deal more time for amusement than ever before. A great amusement enterprise may grow up. Here is one possibility for pleasure in the future: a giant pleasure bubble that rolls along a thousand-mile scenic route.